

i know the sound of your heart by insomniacwriter17

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Art Museums, Car Accidents, Character Death, Coming Out, Distraction tactics, F/M, Fluff, Grieving, Kissing, M/M, Mentions of drunk dads, Multi, Nancy grieves, Neck Kissing, Other, Period Typical Homophobia, Polyamorous discussions, Polyamory Negotiations, Road Trip, Secret Relationships, Steve and Nancy and Jonathan are actually friends here, Steve's still the best babysitter, mentions of anger, more tags later!, surprise trips

Language: English

Characters: Barbara "Barb" Holland, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lonnie Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Mr. Harrington, Mrs. Harrington, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-05

Updated: 2018-06-17

Packaged: 2022-04-22 05:01:02

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings, No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 8

Words: 22,032

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Steve's been feeling things, and he doesn't quite understand why.

Imagine his surprise when someone else feels the same way.

(aka the story of the ot3 that deserves all the attention in the world)

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

//she said i got a problem with your shoes and your
tunes but i might move in; and i thought that you
were straight, but now im wondering -the sound;; the
1975//

The first time Steve felt it, he was sitting at the diner with all the kids after school. He'd agreed to take the dipshits out for ice cream to celebrate the end of the school year, but his attention was ripped away from their conversation about the new Dungeon and Dragons campaign when the bell above the door chimed, and in walked Nancy Wheeler. He literally choked on his milkshake when she smiled at him, and to Steve's surprise, his stomach still fluttered when he saw Jonathan too.

What the fuck?

Maybe it was just residual Nancy-pining, he told himself, straightening up and waving to his friends good-naturedly. But then when Nancy and Jonathan pulled up chairs to join them at their table and Jonathan's knee was pressed against Steve's due to lack of space, Steve could barely focus on the conversation at hand.

Get it together, Harrington! That's Jonathan fucking Byers. He –

"Earth to Steve?" Dustin waved his hands in front of the teen's face, and Steve startled, jostling the table.

"Shit, D, what the hell?" Steve reprimanded playfully. "Don't scare a man when he's thinking!"

"Whatever it was, you were thinking pretty hard! Gonna fill us in?" Jonathan chuckled.

"Wouldn't you like to know, Byers?" Steve scoffed sarcastically, casting a smirk in Jonathan's direction.

~*~*~

The second time Steve felt it, he was dropping Will off at home Saturday night after the Dungeons and Dragons campaign had ended. How Steve had become wrapped up in that nerdy game, he still was unsure. Even though he still had no idea how it worked, and these twelve-year-olds had to keep explaining what the hell was happening, he was invested.

(But if anyone asked, he'd already practiced his blank 'I have no earthly idea what you mean' face and the dismissive hand wave and scoff combo).

"Thanks for the ride, Steve!" Will recited politely from the passenger seat, shooting him a grin.

"Anytime, kid," the older boy reached out and clapped a hand on Will's shoulder. "Tell Mama Joyce hi for me, will ya?" Will nodded and then jumped out of the car, running up the steps to the front door. Steve waited, wanting to make sure he got inside before driving away.

Listen, the kid had been possessed by a shadow monster; *twice*. Steve was not overprotective. He was reasonable.

But apparently the door was locked, because instead of opening the door, Will began to knock. Then he looked over his shoulder and smiled apologetically at Steve, the teen gave him a thumbs up to let him know it was no big deal.

After a moment, the door opened, and god *damn it*, Steve had to stop choking on air when Jonathan Byers appeared in his line of sight. In Steve's defense, Jonathan had *no shirt on*, and was much more muscular than Steve had given him credit for. The latter part was noticeable when Jonathan lifted his arm to wave his thanks to Steve, which he returned probably a little too eagerly.

Then the front door was shut and Steve let out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding, also realizing he was white knuckling his steering wheel. Groaning loudly, Steve dropped his head into his hands and rubbed his eyes. "Stop this, Harrington," he said out loud. "Don't even go there."

So he just went home instead.

~*~*~

The third time Steve felt it, it took him by surprise. He jumped nearly a mile in the air when he closed his locker door and Jonathan and Nancy both stood in front of him. "Jesus H Christ, you can't do that to a man," he gasped, immediately looking around to make sure no one saw his momentary freak out

"Sorry," Nancy smiled kindly. Steve's heart swelled in his chest and he swallowed thickly as he noticed how tightly intertwined Jonathan's and Nancy's hands were. He glanced up and studied both of them for a moment. They both looked...almost nervous?

"What's going on?" Steve asked, his voice dropping. "Is it the..."

"No. Oh, god no," Jonathan cut in immediately, reaching out and grabbing Steve's arm. Immediately he pulled away, like he hadn't realized what he'd done before he'd done it.

"We just wondered if you were busy after school," Nancy jumped into the conversation. "Or if you could meet with us for some coffee."

"I mean, I can," Steve said slowly, turning so he was leaning against the lockers. "What's this about?"

Jonathan lowered his eyes and even Nancy shifted her gaze around before dropping her voice. "It's not really something we want to talk about here. So, uh, meet us at the diner at four?"

Steve just nodded slowly, looking between the two in front of him. "You guys are acting really weird."

The rest of the day couldn't go fast enough, and Steve couldn't pay attention to anything his teachers said; he was too busy racking his brain about what Jonathan and Nancy wanted.

Somehow, even though Steve left as soon as the bell rang, Nancy and Jonathan were already sitting in the far booth of the shop with their own coffees, and one for Steve as well. Hesitantly, Steve slid onto the bench across from the two of them. "Hi," he murmured nervously,

wrapping his hands around the coffee cup.

“Hey,” Jonathan replied, looking up at Steve through the hair hanging in his eyes. Then it was silent, and after a moment, Nancy nudged Jonathan’s shoulder.

Jonathan opened his mouth like he wanted to say something, but faltered and shook his head, blushing bright red.

“Jesus, Byers, what’s going on with you? You’re acting weird,” Steve snipped, feeling very cornered suddenly. “Who’s going to tell me what’s going on?”

More silence. The longer it was quiet, the more uncomfortable Steve got. It built more and more in his gut, until he felt like he was going to explode. “Maybe I should go,” he whispered. He pushed the coffee toward the middle of the table and made to stand, wanting out of there as soon as possible.

“I...I wanna kiss you.” Jonathan’s voice was just slightly above a whisper. Steve froze, that feeling taking over his entire body. He felt warm and also like every hair on his body was standing up. He turned and looked at the couple, where Jonathan was so red that Steve was concerned, and Nancy was biting her lip and looking at Steve with almost hopeful eyes.

Quietly, Steve slid back into the seat, looking to Jonathan. “What was that, Jonathan?” For some reason, the first name slipped off Steve’s tongue, because calling him Byers just seemed wrong in this moment.

Jonathan opened his mouth to answer, but Steve shook his head. “No, I heard you, I just...”

“So do I,” Nancy interrupted in a quiet voice. “And I saw how you looked at me when we were dating. I’ve seen how you look at him.”

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Steve’s voice was scratchy, because dear lord, he couldn’t breathe.

“Steve,” Nancy had that no-nonsense voice on. “It’s okay. We...we talked about it. It’s...I don’t know.”

“Weird.” Steve spat, immediately regretting it by the way Jonathan’s face seemed to fall. *Shit.*

“Not weird. It’s...unconventional,” Nancy continued, her hand falling to Jonathan’s arm, squeezing to try and comfort him.

Steve had to try really hard not to do the same.

“We’re willing to try it if you are,” Nancy continued. At this Jonathan looked up, and Steve was captivated by his eyes. For a moment, it was like time stopped, and Steve couldn’t stop looking from Jonathan, to Nancy, and back again.

“I...” Steve was literally speechless. “I don’t know.”

Jonathan looked straight at Steve, and Steve could tell he was fighting disappointment. “We’d take it slow,” Jonathan explained. “Dinner, movie, just hanging out. We don’t have to like – “

“You literally started this conversation with ‘I want to kiss you’,” Steve replied in a voice just above a whisper.

God, were they really having this conversation in public??

“Well, I mean...” Jonathan stuttered, looking to Nancy for help. She smiled and put her hand out for Steve to take. Reluctantly, he did so. But, even though he could clearly see Nancy’s hand also on Jonathan’s arm, holding Nancy’s hand seemed *right*.

“Boys, relax,” she whispered, smiling kindly at the both of them. “Everyone just take a deep breath.” When neither boy seemed to listen to instructions, Nancy cocked her head to the side and locked eyes with Steve.

Rolling his eyes a little, Steve took a deep breath. Then she did the same to Jonathan. “Thank you,” she replied with a smile. “Now, I love you both,” she continued. “And I think there’s something else here, too.”

Surprisingly, Steve found himself nodding jerkily. The corners of Jonathan’s mouth turned up the slightest bit to resemble a smile. Then he nodded so slightly it was almost indiscernible.

“Okay, then let’s just try dinner. Friday night, let’s go get pizza and then back to someone’s house for a movie,” she suggested.

“Mine,” Steve offered. “My parents are gone.”

“Great!” she smiled. “Right, Jonathan?”

“Yeah,” he agreed quietly.

“On one condition,” Steve added in a moment of bravery. Both Nancy and Jonathan looked to him, waiting.

“There better be kissing during the movie,” he smirked. “I didn’t just sit through this awkward conversation to not get kissed by the two prettiest people in the room.”

~*~*~

And the fourth time Steve felt it, he was sitting on the couch between Nancy and Jonathan, his hands intertwined with theirs. A movie played on TV, and they were watching contently.

Well, for the most part anyway.

Every time Steve Harrington began kissing, that feeling took over his whole body, his whole mind, and it was like everything had fallen into perfect place. His fingers trailed along Jonathan’s neck, and their eyes were locked.

Steve’s world seemed to stop in its tracks.

And then Nancy’s lips began trailing down the back of Steve’s neck.

And Steve’s world exploded.

Notes for the Chapter:

This was supposed to be a one-shot but then it got out of hand so here is my attempt at an OT3 story! I've never written anything like this before, so please bear with me as I get the hang of it!

Please comment to let me know what you think!

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Secrets are hard to keep. Someone's bound to find out eventually.

Notes for the Chapter:

// seventeen and a half years old, worrying about my brother finding out; where's the fun in doing what you're told? - girls;; the 1975//

In the beginning, they were so careful. Since the three of them were feeling things out and trying to figure out how their relationship was going to work, they really didn't want any extra questions from anyone else.

Dates out in public were...oddly normal. Granted they weren't holding hands or any kind of PDA, so unless you looked hard enough, it just looked like three friends having a nice evening out.

Usually they ended up at Steve's house, because his parents were almost always gone. And in the security of an empty home, the three would talk openly, intertwining limbs and exchanging lazy kisses. Or they'd put on a movie and huddle as close as possible in Steve's bed to watch.

Jonathan had this habit of getting bored during movies, though, and about halfway through the movie he'd play a game of his own invention called "How Quickly Can I Make Them Forget the Movie?"

He'd start by peppering lazy kisses on cheeks and running his hand up and down arms or legs. Nancy usually tried to ignore him, so as not to encourage him, but Jonathan noticed the slight smile that graced her face whenever he'd start.

And Steve was a sucker for physical affection, so he'd turn his head and capture Jonathan's lips with his, or find his hand and hold it, snuggling closer before turning his attention back to the movie.

They did a pretty good job of ignoring him, usually, which just made things all the more entertaining for Jonathan. And when he finally did break their attention away from the movie, Jonathan's favorite thing was to back away, keep his hands to himself, and feign innocence that he'd even been doing anything.

"You're a tease, Byers," Steve would grumble, straightening his collar.

"You're a jerk, Harrington," Jonathan would retort, that innocent grin morphing into a devious one.

But tonight the trio was at Jonathan's house, because for once, Steve's parents were home. And for once, Jonathan's house was empty. Joyce was out with Hopper, helping him buy some clothes for El, because according to him, "this is damn near impossible!" And Will was at the Wheeler's house for the night.

So they settled into the couch with Nancy's legs propped up in Jonathan's lap, Steve's arm wrapped around Jonathan's shoulder so he could hold Nancy's hand. Jonathan's head rested on Nancy's knees, and it was in this comfy position that they argued about what kind of movie to watch and whether or not Ms. Dancy had lost her god damned mind assigning a five page paper over the weekend.

Finally they reached a consensus: they were going to watch *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and yes, Ms. Dancy was insane. The movie was loaded into the VHS player but was still being ignored in favor of the group actually spending part of their Friday night planning what their papers would be about. In the middle of this conversation, Jonathan started to try and stand up. Nancy easily moved her legs to let him off the couch, but Steve wasn't having it.

"You can't leave," Steve whined loudly, wrapping his arms around Jonathan's waist, attempting to pull him back down onto the couch. When the boy fell back onto the cushions, Steve began to try and wrap himself around Jonathan.

"Hey," Jonathan laughed, kissing the top of Steve's head. "I'm just going to the bathroom. Is that too much to ask?"

"Quite possibly," Steve shrugged. Then he made a big dramatic show of groaning and letting go of Jonathan, turning to wrap his arms around Nancy instead. "I'm so alone in this life," he moaned theatrically. Nancy laughed, cupping Steve's head in her hands.

"You're an idiot, Steve Harrington," she smiled sweetly. Jonathan rolled his eyes, standing and glancing at the duo before disappearing down the hall.

"What do we do now?" Steve pouted, and Nancy just smirked, leaning down to kiss him, biting his lip playfully. Immediately Steve pulled himself up from his laying position and turned to face her. "Oh, so that's how it's going to be, hmm?"

Nancy said nothing, just grabbed the collar of his shirt and pulled him in for a passionate kiss.

Steve and Nancy had just managed to get into comfortable positions on the couch, Steve straddling her, when they heard the front door open. Steve's head jerked up as he scrambled off his girlfriend so fast that he fell to the floor.

Will was standing just inside the front door, looking confused. "Steve? What are you doing here?" And then he saw Nancy, and his mouth dropped open. "What the hell?"

"Will..." Nancy started, but immediately Will took off running for the hallway leading toward the bedrooms.

"*Jonathan!*" he shrieked. "Jonathan! Nancy's making out with Steve!"

Jonathan had just opened the bathroom door when he heard his brother screaming, and just split second after he stepped into the hallway, Will was careening into his big brother's body at full force; Jonathan swore he saw stars and wouldn't be able to catch his breath for a while.

"Hey, hey, relax!" Jonathan insisted, taking his brother by the shoulders and shaking him a little bit. "What are you doing home?" he asked, instinctually running his eyes up and down Will's body in fear that he was hurt. From where he stood he could see Nancy and

Steve both standing at the opening of the hallway, watching in concern.

“I left my toothbrush here but I need it so I came back here and I unlocked the door and when I opened it Steve was on the couch! And I thought ‘oh wow, that’s weird’ but then Nancy looked up and they were *making out*! Jonathan! They were *making out*!” Will’s chest was heaving as he hadn’t stopped to take a breath, and Jonathan didn’t know what to do. He felt like his own world was spinning at top speed, and from the pale looks on his partners’ faces, they weren’t doing so hot, either.

“It’s okay,” was what Jonathan elected to say, but even he cringed as it was said. “Listen, Will, it’s okay. I know.”

“You...know? That your girlfriend...is making out...with her ex? In our *house*?” Will sounded flabbergasted.

Jonathan couldn’t really blame him. “I think we should talk,” were the next words out of his mouth, poised at everyone. Carefully, he led Will down the hall and to the living room couch. Jonathan pulled the coffee table closer so he could sit on it and face Will.

Will, for one, looked infuriated. He kept shooting daggers between Nancy and Steve, as if trying to defend his brother. “Okay, before we get too far into this, you need to stop that,” Jonathan insisted.

“Stop what?” Will mumbled while still staring into Nancy’s eyes angrily.

“That,” Jonathan poked Will’s nose. “Look at me.” Will did; his expression softened exponentially. “Okay. This is going to sound weird. And twisted. And it’s a secret. You can’t tell *anyone*. And I mean anyone. Do you understand?”

A silent nod from Will. Jonathan took a deep breath. *Here goes nothing*, he thought to himself sarcastically.

“Yes, I know that Nancy and Steve kiss. It’s because Nancy still loves Steve and vice versa.”

“But –“

"I'm not done," Jonathan chided gently, his hand coming to rest on Will's knee. "I still love Nancy, and Nancy still loves me."

Will's face just kept looking more and more confused, but now his eyes darted between the three of them almost curiously. Steve and Nancy then both stepped forward to sit on the coffee table beside Jonathan. "And apparently I like Steve quite a bit, too," Jonathan admitted, feeling his whole body burn with embarrassment. Before this moment, Jonathan had never even hinted to Will that he may have feelings for men.

"And your brother is incredibly – "

"So what are you telling me?" Will interrupted Steve quickly, but the end of his question was slow. Skeptical. Guarded.

"And so we're trying this thing out where we all kinda...date...each other?" Jonathan trailed off unsurely, looking to Nancy. She was the one who was so good at words.

"It's like cake," Nancy explained. All three boys turned and looked at her, confused. She held up her hand in a gesture of, 'just wait for it'. "Will, you like chocolate cake, right?"

"Yeah," he replied slowly.

"Okay, but you also like brownies, yeah?" Nancy's voice was calm and smooth; Jonathan felt his own heartbeat slowing the longer she talked.

Will nodded, and if Steve wasn't mistaken, he could see realization beginning to dawn on the kid's face. "So how do you choose one, if you like both?" Nancy asked.

Will just shrugged, looking down at his lap. "Listen, no one expects you to understand this," Jonathan promised quietly. "Because honestly, we don't understand it that much yet either."

"Okay," was all Will replied. "Can I go back to Mike's now?" he mumbled.

"Yeah. You want a ride?" Jonathan asked, and Will shook his head.

"I have my bike," he replied before Will all but ran out of the room.

Jonathan sighed and immediately slumped over, resting his head on Nancy's shoulder. "That was awful."

"I'm sorry," Steve sighed, reaching over and brushing the hair off Jonathan's forehead.

"Don't be. We didn't know he'd come home," Jonathan mumbled. "Thanks for taking over," he tilted his head up and kissed Nancy's cheek.

"Of course," she smiled. Hearing Will's footsteps in the hallway, Jonathan stood and opened the front door.

"I'll be back in a minute," he told the two of them. "Don't you dare start the movie without me," he pouted. Then he looked over to where Will had reappeared, and followed him out onto the porch.

"You alright?" Jonathan asked. "I wanna make sure we're cool."

Will looked over and asked, "Who started it?"

"Uh, with us?" Jonathan clarified. "Well, me, actually."

"Okay," Will nodded. "Are you happy?"

"Yeah," Jonathan replied immediately. "Yeah, I think so."

"Then I'm cool," Will nodded, suddenly hugging Jonathan tightly. "I'm sorry I screamed at you and ran into you." Jonathan looked down at his little brother, hugging him back and ruffling his hair.

"It's okay," Jonathan scoffed. "Probably woulda done the same thing," he shrugged. "Do me a favor and call me when you get back to Mike's."

Will nodded and then got onto his bike; Jonathan watched him until he couldn't see Will anymore. Then he opened the front door, immediately groaning and hanging his head. "Seriously? Didn't we learn a lesson?" he scoffed.

Steve's head popped up from above the arm of the couch, a guilty smile on his face. "We thought he'd left."

Shaking his head, Jonathan moved to start the movie and then wiggled his way between Nancy and Steve on the couch. It was almost seamless how quickly the three of them intertwined with one another, relaxing and enjoying their movie. Well, Steve and Nancy were trying to watch the movie; Jonathan was too busy trying to play How Quickly Can I Make Them Forget the Movie.

Answer: very quickly.

Notes for the Chapter:

(edit:: guess I'm going with a "the 1975" lyric theme for the notes of each chapter? I'm gonna roll with it.)

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

September 13 is a bad day.

Notes for the Chapter:

//i wish you'd walk in again; imagine if you just did;
i'd fill you in on the things you missed --nana;; the
1975//

Sometimes Nancy just had these bouts of realization that *oh my god, I'm dating them both*. And that thought was usually followed by, *I wonder what Barb would say*. She missed her best friend. Jonathan and Steve were great; amazing, really. But Barb had been Nancy's best friend since the second grade. Nancy could talk to her about anything – but now she was gone.

Things had gotten a little easier after the announcement that the Department of Energy had taken responsibility for Barb's death. Guilt still ate at Nancy's stomach, but most days it was just a slight nibble as compared to the complete overtaking it had been before.

Today was – well, should have been – Barb's birthday, and Nancy was not handling it well. She'd gotten up, fully intending on going to school, but then suddenly all motivation left her, and she barely had enough energy to crawl back into bed. Sobs wracked her body that she tried to hide in her pillow.

Mike heard her crying. He didn't go into her room. He knew why. But he told his parents what he heard, and they left her alone. They were sad, too.

Jonathan was the one to put two and two together when Nancy didn't show. He and Steve were standing a few feet down from Nancy's locker, trying to casually wait for her without looking like that's what they were actually doing. "Oh shit," Jonathan mumbled after looking at the date on his watch. "Oh, *shit*."

“What? Byers, what’s going on?” Steve frowned, following in confusion as Jonathan took off at a brisk walk down the hall. “Hey! Talk to me, asshole,” he huffed, nearly running into Jonathan as he stopped at the pay phone by the office.

“It’s Barb’s birthday,” was all Jonathan managed, dialing furiously. Steve’s stomach sunk immediately.

“Fuck.”

Nancy wanted to ignore the phone call, but she knew exactly who it was, so she answered anyway. “Hi,” she whispered into the receiver, curling up further beneath the covers of her bed.

“Can we do anything?” Jonathan asked softly. Steve tried to stand beside him and look disinterested. But he didn’t think it was working.

“No,” Nancy’s voice wavered. “I-I just want to be alone today, okay?”

“Nance,” Jonathan frowned. “Is that a good idea?”

“I don’t know,” she was crying, he could tell. “But that’s what I need.”

“Okay.” Jonathan felt uneasy. “Want to talk to Steve?”

“Just for a second,” she murmured. “Hey, Jon?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you. Thanks for calling.”

“You too.” Then he handed the receiver to Steve, but tapped his watch so as to tell Steve to make it quick. ‘She wants to be alone’ he mouthed. Steve nodded.

“Hey, Nan,” Steve’s voice was gentle.

“Hi,” Nancy was sniffing into the receiver, and it made Steve’s heart break. “I love you.”

“You too,” Steve replied, just as Jonathan had. “So much.”

It sounded like Nancy wanted to reply, but a sob broke from her throat instead. Steve whined deep in his throat, feeling helpless. "Sorry," she whispered.

"Don't you dare apologize, Nancy," Steve instructed. "We'll call you at lunch to check up on you, okay? Just a quick call."

"Okay," Nancy agreed. Then silence.

"Talk to you then," Steve finished lamely. He had so much he wanted to say, but none of it was casual enough that he could say in the school hallway. *I'm so sorry we went inside that night, left her alone. I'd search the Upside Down forever to try and find her if we didn't know for sure. I want to hold you right now and make the world right. And I'm sorry I can't.*

Instead, he hung up the phone and sighed as he looked at Jonathan, who, for the record, also looked like he was about to cry. "Let's go to class," Steve mumbled.

"Yeah."

~*~

Eventually, Nancy ended up sitting on the roof outside her bedroom window, staring out across the street. "I miss you," she whispered into the crisp September air. It was quiet. "God, I miss you. What would you say about all this?" she laughed through the tears, swiping at her face with the sleeve of her sweater. She closed her eyes, trying to imagine what it would be like if Barb had been here for all events that had transpired in her absence.

"Wait, Jonathan asked you what?!" Barb gasped. The two girls were sitting on Nancy's bed clad in pajamas and painting their nails. It was another Friday night sleepover, and Nancy had been filling her in on the absolute insanity that transpired throughout the week.

"We were just sitting on the couch, and out of the blue, Jon asked me what kind of kisser Steve was!" Nancy repeated. "I can't make this up."

"Well, what did you say??"

Nancy blushed, biting her lip as she shrugged. "I told him the truth. That he was amazing." Both girls dissolved into giggles. "But wait," Nancy continued quietly. "Then I asked him why he asked and he got all embarrassed and I jokingly asked if he had a thing for Steve." Then she smiled.

"No," Barb gasped. Nancy just looked at her best friend, eyebrow raised. "Jonathan Byers? Interested in men?"

"At least in one," Nancy confirmed, then pointed the nail polish brush at Barb. "Don't you dare tell anyone I said that. Anyone!"

"Oh come on. You think the closeted lesbian's going to out the bisexual boy? Not gonna happen!" Barb insisted. "But back to the point, what are you going to do about it?"

"We think we're going to talk to Steve," Nancy admitted. "You and I both know he's still interested in me, and if my guess is correct, he's not as straight as he'd like people to believe either."

"God, this town gets gayer by the day," Barb sighed, shaking her head. "But you, Nancy Wheeler? Resident good girl, trying the poly game? I never would have guessed!"

"Me either," Nancy whispered out loud to herself, opening her eyes and glancing into her empty room. The room Barb hadn't been in for over a year now; the room where Nancy had always imagined she and Barb getting ready for double dates, proms, graduation; the room where they were going to open college acceptance letters, celebrate with one another, and plan their future. "What future?" she spat bitterly.

Yours.

More tears sprung into Nancy's eyes at the thought. It was such a Barb way of thinking; Nancy could almost hear her say, "Yeah, the situation sucks and it's not ideal. But think about what's good in your life. What you have. Tell me about them. Tell me about Jonathan and Steve like I'm right there with you."

So she did. Nancy sat out on the roof of her house and talked to Barb

about everything. "Jonathan's so quiet, so gentle in everything he does. But it's like he's so gentle because he's so passionate that he can't risk breaking anything. He takes such good care of Will and his mom. Me, too. And now, Steve."

It was the first time all three of them were hanging out alone together after The Talk; sitting in Steve's living room while a movie played. Nancy and Jonathan sat close to one another, holding hands, while Steve sat beside Nancy, stiff as a board. Like he didn't dare move in fear of...of whatever it was he was afraid of.

He was like a spooked puppy, skittish of any movement made beside him. Finally, Jonathan stood and came to stand in front of Steve; Steve looked at the ground. "Hey," Jonathan murmured gently, crouching down in front of the other. Smoothly, slowly – giving Steve a chance to protest – Jonathan put his hands on Steve's knees. Steve didn't pull away. "It's okay. Just breathe. Everything's fine. Can you look up at me?" he asked.

Nancy watched in a frozen fascination as Steve's head slowly picked up until he met eyes with Jonathan. "There ya go. Look, it's safe. You know that, don't you?" A quiet nod from Steve. "What do you want to do? We'll do whatever you want." Steve still didn't answer.

"Can you nod and shake your head for me?" A nod. "Want us to leave?" Immediately, Steve shook his head, eyes widening. "Hey, hey, okay, yeah, that's fine. Do you want to hold Nancy's hand?" A slow, careful nod. "Let's start there then, yeah?" Jonathan looked over to Nancy, who slid a bit closer to them and offered her hand to Steve.

Steve took it, and then, without taking his eyes off of Jonathan's face, held his other hand out to Jonathan as well. And Jonathan took it with a smile.

"Steve's a force to be reckoned with. But you knew that. He gets what he wants when he wants it, but he's so sweet about it. He never takes advantage of the situations at hand; and god, he gets so embarrassed so easily. It's unreal."

The first time Steve kissed Jonathan, it was in the middle of a teasing banter. It had taken Steve some time to relax, but now it was 2 a.m., and all three teens had their guard down more than they had previously.

They'd moved to the basement, where the stereo was, and Jonathan had put in a mixtape he'd brought to the house.

"You brought a mixtape?" Steve laughed.

"Shut up. I made it a long time ago, now just seemed like the right time to listen to it," Jonathan defended himself, leaning back on his elbows and watching Steve put the tape in. Nancy rolled over onto her stomach and moved closer to Jonathan, carefully capturing his lips with hers. Jonathan immediately kissed back.

"Hey now, that's just not fair," Steve whined, dropping down beside Jonathan. "I was promised kisses, too."

"I'm busy," Jonathan murmured against Nancy's lips, and Steve huffed loudly. Before Nancy or Jonathan could realize what was happening, Steve had his arms wrapped around Jonathan's waist and was pulling him away from Nancy. "Heeeey," he whined, though he went easily with Steve, rolling until he was on his side, inches from Steve's face.

"Nan, I'm going to make out with your boyfriend," Steve breathed before leaning forward and experimentally kissing Jonathan. All the breath left Steve's lungs, and Jonathan kissed back. After a moment, Steve turned his head and Jonathan placed a gentle kiss on Steve's neck. Then Jonathan opened his eyes, realizing Nancy was still beside them, watching with a slight smile on her face.

Steve's whole body burned with embarrassment, and he sat up quickly. Jonathan moved away quickly, not wanting to push too far. "You okay?" he asked in concern.

"I-uh, bathroom," Steve spat out, looking for any and every reason to get out of the room that felt like it was closing in on him. Then he ran from the room, and it wasn't until Nancy knocked on the open door frame a few minutes later that Steve looked up from the sink, where water was running down the drain.

"Just checking on you," she whispered, and Steve turned to look at her, feeling his cheeks heating up again. "You're embarrassed," she realized, eyebrows furrowing in concern. "Why?"

Steve shrugged. *"It's just...new. You were just right there and it was just, I don't know," he stuttered.*

"You're cute when you're flustered," Nancy whispered, offering her hand to him. "Come on, we're going to work this out together."

"Jonathan always smells like smoke and cologne. Because his mom smokes at home, but he doesn't, and he tries hard to cover the smell because he knows it makes Steve sick sometimes. And Steve always smells like freshly washed clothes and the school gym. Because he changes clothes after basketball practice, but god, you know our gym. It just smells." Nancy let out a quiet laugh, resting her head on her knees.

"Jonathan's anger is quiet, seething. He clenches his fists and licks his lips. Everything he does is so deliberate. He never explodes. It's so direct; it gets right to the point."

Lonnie entered the house, reeking of alcohol. "William! Let's go! We're fucking late!" he called. Jonathan had stood up the moment Lonnie had opened the door, leaving Nancy on the couch to watch quietly.

"You aren't taking him in that state," Jonathan decided. "It's not safe."

"And who are you to tell me what do?" Lonnie spat at him. "Where's Will? WILL!" Lonnie could barely stand straight; he was wavering back and forth on his feet precariously. A door opened, and everyone looked on as Will entered the living room, looking terrified. Nancy couldn't stop herself from moving to stand by the young boy, her arm around his shoulder.

"Go home. You're drunk. Will doesn't even like baseball," Jonathan's voice was just as even as it had been a moment ago, but his fists were clenched so tightly that his hand was turning white.

Later, Nancy would clean the cuts left behind by his fingernails.

Jonathan stared at Lonnie with determined eyes, repeating himself over and over again that Will was staying here and Lonnie would be leaving, until finally Lonnie stumbled out the door and left. But Jonathan never lost his cool, he never screamed. He was in complete control.

"Steve blows up. He's like a firecracker going off. He gets this insane heat in his eyes; he slams doors; he yells and shouts until he's got no emotion left at all."

"The asshole hit my car!" Steve was pacing back and forth in front of his couch, where Nancy and Jonathan sat, watching him. "He saw me walking toward it and he just backed right into it!"

"Are you sure?" Jonathan tried quietly. "Are you sure it wasn't an accident?"

"Of course I'm fucking sure! It's Billy fucking Hargrove! That bastard doesn't do anything on accident! He's just a fucking asshole that's had it out for me since day one! And I'm not even mad about the car, damn it! He hit the car while Dustin and Lucas were inside it! He watched them get in the fucking car and then he slammed into it!"

Steve's hands flew out, hitting the doorframe and causing the vase on the entry hall table to wobble precariously before settling back into its rightful place. No one moved; Steve leaned his head against the wall and breathed heavily while Nancy and Jonathan watched quietly, but not fearfully. They knew how this worked.

Finally, there was a shuddering sigh from Steve. Jonathan stood up then, crossing the room and taking Steve's wrists in his hands. "Hey, it's okay. You're mad, I get that. Billy Hargrove is an asshole. But look at it this way. No one was hurt." He looked into Steve's eyes, which looked tired and teary now, not like a fire was burning in them like they had the entire ride home in Jonathan's car.

"Yeah," Steve whispered. "I guess you're right."

"They're so good, Barb," Nancy whispered. "Everything about them is great. Everything about us is perfect. I love them both. I love them so much I can barely stand it. I want everyone to know it, but I'm so scared to tell people. This is Hawkins, god damn it. You know what that's like," she wiped more tears from her cheeks. "You never even told your parents."

"But I wish you were here. If you were here, maybe I'd be brave enough. I wish you were here because I want you to be happy with

me. Because I wanted you to find someone you could feel like this with. And I'm so sorry you didn't get that chance." After that, Nancy didn't talk. She just sat in silence, letting tears fall until she had no more to cry.

Then she crawled back inside, closed her window, and waited for them to call.

"Can you come over?" she asked softly as soon as Steve greeted her.

"We're on the way," was his immediate reply. And then the three of them were huddled in Nancy's small bed, Nancy between the two boys and tucked against Steve's chest while Jonathan traced shapes on her shoulder with one hand, the other intertwined with hers. It was silent; they didn't need to say anything.

"Do they make you happy?" Barb would ask.

"Yes," Nancy would grin. "So happy."

"Do they protect you?"

"Always."

"Then screw everything else," Barb would wave her hands and shake her head. "That's all that matters."

Notes for the Chapter:

This ended up way longer than I thought it would be, but it just wrote itself. Oops.

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

They agree it's time. Jonathan and Steve step up to the plate first.

Notes for the Chapter:

//you got something to say? why don't you speak it out loud, instead of living in your head? it's always the same, why don't you take your heart out, instead of living in your head? -heart out;; the 1975//

A few days after Nancy had spent the day at home thinking about just how important the boys were to her, she knew what she wanted to do. "We should tell everyone," she mentioned suddenly at the ice cream parlor, and Jonathan's eyes widened, coughing as he choked on his milkshake.

"Wait, what? Where'd this come from?" Steve asked. "Not that I disagree that eventually people need to know, but why so suddenly?" Beside him, Jonathan was coughing still, so Steve slid him his cup of water nonchalantly.

"Life's short," Nancy murmured, stirring her melting ice cream with her spoon. "And I really don't know about you guys, but I'm running out of excuses to use on my parents." She looked up and shrugged. "You guys make me happy. Why shouldn't people know that?"

"Because this is Hawkins? And people don't just turn the other cheek on unconventional behavior?" Steve offered. "I'm just playing devil's advocate here," he reasoned after receiving a glare from Jonathan.

"I'm not saying put a freaking announcement in the paper, Harrington," Nancy laughed at him. "But our family? Our friends? I mean, Will already knows. That went fine enough." She smiled wistfully and leaned forward. "Think of Thanksgiving, Christmas! They're coming up here soon and think of how fun it would be to be able to spend it together."

"We spend time together already with everyone," Steve mentioned. "We just had a big dinner last night with all the munchkins and Mama Byers and Hop. But they don't need to *know*." His banana split sat in front of him, forgotten by now.

"But we could be *together* together, around them," Nancy sighed. "I'm tired of censoring ourselves around our families. We shouldn't have to," her eyes got a little more serious. "Don't you think?"

Steve was silent, considering this. Instead of speaking, he looked at Jonathan inquisitively.

"I – she has a point. I've wanted to tell my mom so she'll stop asking why Nancy never comes around without you anymore. I think she might have a sneaking suspicion already," Jonathan admitted.

"What's going through your mind?" Nancy asked Steve after a moment of silence, and Steve just sighed, shrugging.

"I just...I don't want things to change," he finally admitted. "I'm afraid the more people that know, the quicker this could go south. And I'm not ready for that. I don't want to lose you."

"You won't lose us," Nancy insisted. Steve felt a nudge under the table; Nancy's ankle pressing against his. "It'd take more than some angry people to do that," she laughed. "Remember, we literally fought a Demogorgon in the Byers' living room."

"Twice," Steve interjected with the slightest smile.

"Let's start where you feel most comfortable. Who do you want to tell first?" Jonathan suggested. "Start at the easy people – and the more people that know and accept it, the easier it will be to tell the people you're scared of."

Steve thought about that proposition for a moment. It did actually make a lot of sense. Nancy and Jonathan sat quietly while Steve worked through it in his brain. When he finally began to return to the here and now, he felt Nancy's ankle still hooked on his, and Jonathan's hand resting lightly on his knee under the cover of the table.

“Let’s tell the munchkins,” he offered, looking around the table. “Is that okay?”

Slowly, Nancy nodded, looking to Jonathan. The male was looking a little more skeptical, and he sighed, “Do you think they could keep it a secret?”

“El lived in my basement for a week, remember? They didn’t tell anybody. The shitheads can keep a secret,” Nancy’s voice was endearing; the boys (and Max and El) really were good kids. The teens just had to rag on them every once in a while.

“So, the kids? Say, this weekend? I think they’re going to Dustin’s to hang out Friday night,” Jonathan offered.

“They are,” Steve nodded. “And Ms. Henderson asked me to babysit because she has to work. That’s why I thought that’d be a good starting place. We’d be alone, they could ask a million questions, and that would be that.”

“I’m just offended you were going to just go rogue on us Friday night without telling us,” Jonathan laughed.

“Well, now I’m not,” Steve smiled tightly, still trying to hide his nerves. “So, Friday?”

“Friday,” the other two agreed.

~*~

By the time Friday night rolled around, Steve was a nervous wreck. “Honey, are you sure you feel alright?” Ms. Henderson fret. “If you need to go home, I’m sure Nancy or Jonathan would come watch the boys instead!” she offered.

“I’m fine, Ms. H. Funny you should mention them though – Nancy and Jonathan and I are paired up on a school project, so they’re coming over to work on it while the mun – the kids – watch a movie,” Steve smiled charmingly at her.

“Okay, then. You’re a real doll, Steve Harrington,” Ms. Henderson reached up and pinched his cheek before grabbing her purse. “Pizza

money's on the fridge!" she called over her shoulder before leaving. The door shut, and then it was quiet. Dustin wasn't even home yet – he'd gone to the arcade with Lucas after school.

But Jonathan had coordinated a pickup schedule, and he'd show up soon with Will, Lucas, and Dustin. Nancy was already on her way with Mike and Max. El wouldn't be there tonight Nancy had said; according to Mike, Hopper was in a mood after a suspicious phone call, and wouldn't let El out of his sight.

Steve had spent a few campaign nights with the group by now, and Lord knows how many times he, Jonathan, and Nancy had ordered pizza, so Steve took his nervous energy and put it to good use by ordering pizza for everyone.

Just as he hung up the phone with the pizza delivery, he heard a knock at the door, then it opened on its own. "Steve?" Nancy's voice called out, immediately calming some of Steve's fears.

"In the kitchen!" he called back. A moment later, she appeared in the doorway, and Steve was enamored. Her brunette hair framed her face with light curls, and dimples showed him that she was just as excited to see him as he was her.

Then Mike and Max appeared, and Steve immediately cleared his throat. "Wheeler! Staying out of trouble?" he asked. Max just rolled her eyes.

"Only when I have to," Mike retorted quickly. "We're going to hang out in Dustin's room," he told Nancy. "You guys are boring."

"Thanks a lot, asshole," Nancy scoffed. "Go on, then." Just as suddenly as the kids appeared, they were gone. Both teens listened for the footsteps on the stairs, and then Nancy made her way around the counter to hug Steve. "How are you feeling?" she wondered.

"Like I'd rather fight the Demogorgon again and get punched in the face by Billy Hargrove than do this," Steve sighed, smiling softly. "You?"

"About the same," Nancy admitted. "But it just seems like the right

next step.”

“It does,” Steve agreed honestly. “That’s why I’m here.” And even though it was risky, he leaned down to give her a quick kiss. “And as long as you and Jon are too, I’ll be okay.”

~*~

The evening began to wind down after pizza and ice cream had been eaten, a couple games of Clue played, and a movie was decided on. When everyone was seated around the living room, Jonathan cast a glance to Steve, then Nancy. Both of them shrugged. *Now or never*, Jonathan guessed.

“Hey, guys? We need to talk to you,” Jonathan requested. Immediately all conversation stopped and all the kids were looking at Jonathan, confused.

“Is everything okay?” Max asked immediately. Will seemed to relax in his seat, like he knew what was coming.

“Everything’s great, Red. We just need to tell you something so that you’re in the loop,” Steve jumped in from where he was reclined against the couch arm. Beside him, Mike’s eyes narrowed as he looked between Steve and Jonathan.

“Is it about El?” Mike sounded so worried, and it was then that Nancy jumped in.

“No, Mike. El’s great. She’s not a part of this.” She sat up and looked between the boys, grinning shyly. “So which one of us is going to actually –“

“Jesus Christ, just say something already,” Dustin groaned. “The suspense is killing me!”

“We’re dating,” Jonathan stated suddenly. Mike shrugged.

“That’s not new news?” he replied. “You and Nancy have dated for a while,” he slumped back on the couch and sighed.

“Well, actually, Wheeler, there’s more to it than that,” Steve jumped

in then. “We’re all dating. Like...the three of us.” The room went silent for a minute, and Steve could hear his heartbeat in his ears.

Jonathan wasn’t even aware that he was holding his breath until he realized his chest was about to explode, and even then, he could barely pull enough air into his chest. Even Nancy had her hands on her face, covering her mouth and nose and looking at her brother nervously.

“I knew it!” Dustin gasped, and suddenly all three teens turned all their focus to him.

“What?” they exclaimed simultaneously. Dustin shrugged, looking between them.

“I didn’t really,” Dustin admitted. “I just hoped.”

“How long?” Mike asked suddenly. His face was an odd mixture of confusion, slight disgust, and curiosity.

“A couple weeks,” Nancy answered, looking to her brother. “We didn’t want to say anything until we had it kind of figured out.”

“Why?” this time, it was Max that chimed in.

“Why are we dating?” Steve clarified. “Because I mean, they make me happy.” That was the simplest answer he could think of, because he was not here to get into deep detail with a bunch of preteens.

“We’ve been through a lot in the past year or so, and we’ve been there for each other,” Nancy added. “It didn’t seem right when it was just two of us.”

“Because I wanted to,” Jonathan added with a shrug. “It’s just that simple.”

“It doesn’t seem simple,” Lucas mumbled, looking between the three of them.

“It’s like how people can like both chocolate cake and brownies,” Will offered, and Jonathan smiled at his brother. It was nice to know that he’d been listening that night. While the brothers hadn’t

discussed it since the night Will found out, Jonathan had hoped that Will knew he could come talk to him if he needed to. "How did you know?" Will added.

"That we wanted this? By just trying it. Feeling it out, figuring out what seemed right to us," Steve explained. "Which is kind of why it took us some time to tell you. And, shitheads, listen here," he added fondly. "No one else knows, so you have to keep this a secret for now."

"You told us first?" Mike asked. "Why?"

"We figured you would be the most open to it," Nancy said gently. "And we would love to have people in our corner, because I guarantee that it's not going to be so easy with other people."

"Like Mom and Dad?" Mike wondered; Nancy's lack of an answer was answer enough. After just a split second, Mike was off the couch and hugging Nancy tightly. As uncharacteristic as it was for her brother to be affectionate, Nancy welcomed it and hugged him back. The hug went on longer than Mike expected it to, but then he heard his sister snifle in his shoulder.

Jonathan and Steve both glanced over at the sound, then shared a look; frowning when they saw Nancy trying to hide her face in Mike's shoulder. Maybe she'd been more afraid of telling people than she'd let on. Steve felt a little guilty – she'd seemed so confident about this whole thing that he never considered she wouldn't be okay.

Nancy whispered something into Mike's shoulder, and Mike nodded immediately, not letting go of her. When she finally did look up a couple seconds later, it was like she'd never even been close to crying.

"We have a movie to be watching, don't we?" she smiled, squeezing Mike's arm one more time before he made his way back to the couch. There were scattered agreements from around the room, but then Dustin waved his hand in the air.

"Wait, I have one more question!" he gasped.

“Shoot,” Steve allowed; meanwhile, he and Jonathan slid onto the seat beside Nancy, the three awkwardly sitting beside each other, acutely aware of the others in the room.

“Who uses more hair spray? Steve or Nancy?”

“Hey!” Steve interjected. The room erupted into giggles. It was awkward and some of it seemed a little forced, but it was okay. It would be okay, they hoped.

The night dissolved into them all lounging around the living room watching a movie; then the kids all crashed in Dustin’s room for the night. While waiting for Ms. Henderson to come home from work, Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan splayed out across the couch, laying out all their fears about what could happen when they began telling parents of their relationship.

Jonathan, while worried, was definitely the least nervous of the three of them. He knew his mother was one of the least judgmental people on the planet, especially when it came to her boys.

Steve was about forty percent sure that his parents would be so busy that sitting down and having a conversation would be futile because they wouldn’t listen. But the other sixty percent of him was afraid that his parents would see this as a chip in the perfect family façade they had going and all hell would break loose.

However, it turned out Nancy was the most nervous. “They’re just so damn conservative,” Nancy sighed. “I just don’t foresee it going well.”

“We can wait,” Jonathan suggested. “Nothing says we have to tell your parents yet.”

“That’s not fair,” Nancy shook her head. “If you guys are going to do it, so can I.” Jonathan reached out and took her hand, squeezing it tightly in his own.

“We’ll do mine first,” Jonathan promised. “We’ll work our way up the difficulty ladder. Take it slow.”

“Yeah,” Nancy agreed. “That sounds good.” She nestled her head on

his shoulder, and Steve smiled from across the couch.

“You’re beautiful, Nancy Wheeler,” he murmured.

“Hey, what about me?” Jonathan pouted.

“You’re pretty okay, too, Byers,” Steve winked.

~*~

It was okay with Joyce. In fact, it was more than okay with her. “Really?” she asked a little incredulously. Looking between the three kids on her couch.

“Really, Mom,” Jonathan chuckled.

“Well that’s just great you guys! I’m happy for you! As long as you guys are all happy. Just know you two are always welcome here,” she told Steve and Nancy. There was a ding from behind them, and Joyce stood. “Dinner’s done! Give me just a moment and it’ll all be ready!” Then she was walking into the kitchen, leaving the teens alone.

“Thanks, Mama Byers,” Steve smiled, relaxing a little more on the couch. Beside him, Nancy moved to tuck herself into Steve’s side. Easily, Steve’s arm draped across her shoulders and his hand draped on Jonathan’s shoulder.

“Well that was easy,” Nancy whispered. “I love your mom,” she smiled at Jonathan.

“I do too,” Jonathan sounded relieved that the conversation had gone so well. By the time the teens were sat at the table with Will and Joyce, it was like the announcement was old news. Instead they talked about the English paper Will had written, and how they’d all been pleasantly surprised with the A minus he’d gotten.

A week later found the teens at Steve’s house, standing in the kitchen while Mrs. Harrington flitted about, cleaning the already spotless counters. “Mom, could you relax for like half a second?” Steve pleaded. “We really need to talk to you.”

Mrs. Harrington looked up and stared at Steve, as if she was just

noticing him in the room. "What is it, baby?" she asked. Steve seemed to falter, his mouth opening but no sounds coming out. Nancy carefully squeezed his arm before dropping her hands politely to her side again.

"We...we're dating," Steve's voice faltered at first, but then he straightened up and finished the statement proudly. "The three of us." Mrs. Harrington froze, blinking rapidly and glancing between the three teenagers.

"Oh?" she responded, finally dropping the dish rag onto the counter. "Is that so?"

"Yes," Steve replied. "You know Nancy and I dated a while back, right?" he confirmed. Mrs. Harrington nodded slowly. "Okay, so then the only real news here is that Jonathan and I are dating, too."

"Jonathan," Mrs. Harrington repeated as she stared at the boy, almost like she was feeling the name out in her mouth. Jonathan lifted his hand slightly in a shy wave. Mrs. Harrington forced a smile. "Have you told your father?" she asked.

"Not yet," Steve admitted. "I wanted to see what you would say first."

"Oh. Well, as long as you're being safe," was all she replied before picking up the dish cloth again, and just like that her attention was gone. Steve watched her for a moment but then shook his head, leading the other two out of the kitchen.

"That could've gone worse," Jonathan murmured to Nancy, who shrugged. Steve didn't stop walking until he entered the basement, where he slumped down onto the couch with an angry sigh.

"Hey," Nancy fell onto the couch beside him, and Jonathan eventually settled on Steve's other side. "Take a breath," she requested. Steve let his chest dramatically rise and fall, and then his head fell onto Jonathan's shoulder.

"She couldn't have cared less," Steve mumbled after a moment. "I didn't think I'd care that she didn't. But I'm mad," he admitted. "I'm

mad she's not happy for me."

Nancy didn't say anything, she just rubbed Steve's arm with her free hand and listened quietly. Jonathan was also silent, but his head leaned against Steve's in an attempt to comfort him. "She might come around," Nancy offered. "Just give her some time to digest."

Just then, they heard footsteps on the stairs, and the three straightened up and separated just as Steve's father appeared on the stairs. "Your mom says your boyfriend's here?" he sounded confused. "Since when are you gay?"

"I'm not gay," Steve retorted. "I happen to have a boyfriend and a girlfriend," Steve gestured to both Nancy and Jonathan.

"Oh," Mr. Harrington faltered, looking between the three of them. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," Steve replied firmly. Then there was a tense silence; for a moment, Nancy and Jonathan were afraid all hell was about to break loose.

"Okay. As long as you're happy and being safe," Mr. Harrington replied before turning on his heel and heading back up the stairs.

It was silent for a moment; then all three teens let out a sigh. Jonathan's hand intertwined with Steve's, and he smiled softly. "You feel okay about that?" he wondered.

"It could be worse," Steve echoed. "I'm not happy with it, but at least they don't hate me."

"I highly doubt your parents could hate you," Jonathan insisted, looking between his boyfriend and girlfriend. "Either of you," he promised.

"We'll see about that," Nancy sighed. It was Steve who looked over next, kissing her temple lightly.

"We'll make sure it's okay," Steve whispered. "We will."

Notes for the Chapter:

Nancy's family in the next chapter! I was going to put it here, but it got way too long! Thanks for reading!!!

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

//we're all human, we're just like you man; we're
sentient, we're something -loving someone;;the
1975//

Nancy put it off for as long as she could, but she really did feel quite guilty that she'd been so motivated to tell their families and then chickened out. So almost three weeks after Steve's parents had been so indifferent to their relationships, Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve were sitting down to dinner with the rest of the Wheeler clan.

Dinner itself went well enough; Mike and the teens carried most of the conversation. That wasn't very unusual though, and it wasn't until Holly finished her food and ran off to play that Nancy decided there was no turning back. "Mom? Dad? I need to tell you something."

"What is it, dear?" Karen immediately looked concerned, and even Ted put down the newspaper he'd been reading. He studied his daughter over the rim of his glasses, and Nancy took a deep breath. Mike watched his sister carefully, having chosen to stay back as emotional support.

"Can you promise not to get mad?" she found herself asking, wringing her hands nervously. Carefully, Jonathan reached out and rested his hand on Nancy's wrist. She paused, looking up at him. Jonathan smiled encouragingly, then dropped his hand. Nancy took a shaky breath and looked back to her parents.

"Honey, you can talk to us," Karen insisted gently, leaning forward on her arms. "What's going on?"

"I...I'm dating both Jonathan and Steve," Nancy mumbled quickly, dropping her head where she couldn't see her parent's reaction. "The three of us. Together."

"What?" Karen's voice was one of shock, and Steve found that he

couldn't look at her either.

"No, absolutely not," Ted interjected. Then Nancy looked up, meeting eyes with her father.

"It's not really something I was asking," she replied softly. "Just telling." Ted's eyes narrowed, and suddenly the two were staring each other down in silence.

"You're just confused," Ted responded after what seemed like hours of waiting. "That's not how relationships work. You can't love more than one person."

"You love both Mike and I, don't you?" Nancy asked, crossing her arms in hopes it would stop her hands from shaking visibly. She didn't think it worked.

"That's different," Ted defended, slamming his hand on the table. "Don't play that card."

"How? How's it different?" Nancy shot back.

"That's natural! You're my children! This..." Ted pointed a finger at the three of them. "This is just – it's not right!" Ted stood up so fast his chair screeched across the floor and made everyone flinch. Jonathan had hunched in on himself and Steve had dropped his head to his chest and was avoiding any and all eye contact. Nancy was the only one looking up, staring at her dad in fear.

"Dad..." she begged softly. Ted said nothing as he stomped away from the table; though he stopped in the doorway of the dining room and turned around, pointing his finger at his daughter.

"I will not allow this under my roof! No daughter of mine will act in such a whorish way!" he all but shouted before turning on his heel and stomping out of the room. He left behind him a silence that seemed to swallow the room, and Nancy stared down at her empty plate with watery eyes.

"Nance," it was Mike that finally spoke; when he did, his voice trembled. "He didn't mean –"

“Yes, he did. He said exactly what he meant,” Nancy replied coldly.

“Nancy, honey, you’ve got to cut him some slack. He had a long day and I think you just surprised him. I think we’re all surprised,” Karen spoke up. Immediately Nancy locked eyes with her mom, tears threatening to spill.

“Don’t you dare defend him,” she spat. “You heard what he said.”

“Maybe you two should go,” Karen suggested to Jonathan and Steve. The boys both looked a little unsure, but Nancy shook her head.

“I want them to stay,” Nancy insisted, continuing to lock eyes with her mother. “You can’t do this to me.”

“I’m not doing anything,” Karen replied. “I just think there needs to be some cool-down time and you and I need to talk with your father.”

“There was no cool-down time needed when I first said I was dating Steve,” Nancy replied. “Or with Jonathan, for that matter. So really, this shouldn’t be that shocking.”

“Nancy, please,” Karen sounded tired; not shocked, not angry, just tired. “I need to get Holly down for the night and I need to talk to your father because he’s obviously lost his damn mind.” She sat and rubbed her temples with her eyes closed, and Nancy started to feel the slightest bit guilty. “So please, let’s not fight tonight. I don’t have it in me. I need to talk to your father.”

“Fine,” Nancy mumbled. Karen stood and smoothed her skirt.

“Thank you. Please clear the dishes off the table,” she requested before leaving the dining room. It was silent for a few moments, and then Nancy’s head dropped into her hands and she began to cry softly.

Steve and Jonathan shared a look over Nancy’s head, then Jonathan reached out and placed his hand on her shoulder. Steve did the same. Mike watched sadly as neither boy said anything, a little angry they weren’t doing more to help her.

Then again, he didn't know what to do either.

~*~

A few days passed in which Nancy left the house before her parents were awake, and she didn't come home until they'd gone to bed. Each day, Mike offered to be the liaison between his sister and his parents, making sure they knew Nancy was okay, and telling Nancy that they wanted to talk.

Nancy didn't want to talk.

She spent a lot of time at the Harrington's house, because unlike the Byers', Nancy's parents didn't know where they lived. Jonathan was almost always at the Harrington's too, and they seemed to exist in their own little world. The three took turns making whatever dinner they could scrounge up with what was in the Harrington's kitchen, spent their early afternoons draped around the living room doing homework, and generally just co-existed in the same space.

Around ten at night, Jonathan would drive Nancy home and watch as she would climb into her bedroom through her window, waiting until she turned and waved at him before he would home. Then he'd be there early in the morning, before the sun rose, and they'd spend some time at the twenty-four hour diner getting coffee and breakfast before going to school to meet up with Steve.

This went on for almost a week, but then one afternoon, Mike called Steve's house. "Mom and Dad really want to talk to you," he told his sister. "I-I think everything's okay." Nancy wasn't quite sure when this had happened – somewhere between the first fight with the Demogorgon and today, apparently – but Nancy had begun to trust Mike with her life. Something that was kind of weird if she thought about it too hard.

But wasn't their whole life weird?

"Okay," she agreed. "I'll come home tonight," she sighed. Both Steve and Jonathan looked up at Nancy in surprise, and she shrugged at them unsurely. "Thanks, Mike," she added. "Love you."

Whatever Mike said must have been sarcastic, because Nancy scoffed before shaking her head. "Yeah, thanks, asshole. I'll see you tonight."

After she hung up the phone, Nancy dropped back onto the couch beside the boys. "Are you okay?" Steve asked her, his hand immediately falling into her hair to scratch her scalp lightly.

"I think so," she sighed, closing her eyes and dropping her head to his shoulder. "Kind of don't want to do this, kind of want it to just be over."

"Did you want us to come with you?" Jonathan asked. After a pause, Nancy shook her head.

"Just...stay here?" she requested. "In case I come back over?"

"Of course," both boys answered immediately. "We'll wait here for a call or a knock on the door," Steve added, pressing a kiss to Nancy's temple. The three of them sat in a comfortable silence for the remainder of the afternoon, each one of them gearing up for what was to come.

When it was time for Nancy to head home, Steve offered to drive her there. Nancy agreed, and Jonathan rode along just for moral support. The boys dropped her off, nervously watching her walk in the door.

Nancy stepped into the house and quietly shut the door. She felt awkward in her own home she realized, and she looked around for Mike. As if he was psychic, Mike appeared at the top of the stairs and gave her a sad smile. She waved.

"Nancy? Is that you?" Karen's voice floated in from the kitchen, and Nancy swallowed thickly before answering with a wavering 'yes'. She headed into the room and was greeted by her father sitting at the table while Karen plated spaghetti for them all.

Holly was conveniently absent from the dinner, and it became apparent quickly that her parents were unhappy with Mike's presence as well. "Are you sure you didn't want to go to Will's tonight?" Karen asked.

"I'm sure," Mike replied, sitting next to his sister at the table and

kicking her ankle softly. Normally she'd kick right back and call him a brat, but she realized this was an encouraging kick, like, 'I'm here as backup'.

Again, Nancy wasn't sure when she became so reliant on her brother.

But she didn't mind.

Dinner began with silence; the four of them eating and not looking at one another. Eventually Karen and Ted began sharing glances, and finally Ted cleared his throat.

"Nancy," Ted began. "First, I want to apologize for what I said. It was awful and I never should have said it." Nancy didn't react, studying the spaghetti on her plate with an intensity she didn't even know she possessed. "I reacted the way I did because I didn't understand."

"You called me a whore," Nancy cut in. "That's a bit of an overreaction, don't you think?"

"Definitely," Ted agreed, putting down his fork. "And I want you to know that I really, truly am sorry that I chose to react how I did. I should've tried to understand, first."

"We just don't...we don't understand, dear," Karen interrupted. "The whole thing."

"Polyamory," Mike interjected, and immediately all three of his family turned their heads to look at him. "I looked it up in the dictionary," he explained.

"They make me happy," Nancy shrugged. She wasn't sure what else to say. "It's been a very hard year and they've been constants and we've bonded and it just...happened," she explained. "And we're happy. It works."

The room fell back into silence, and Nancy stared down at her lap again, just waiting.

"I can't argue with happy," Karen finally said softly, and Nancy looked up unsurely. Her mother was smiling kindly at her. "I still don't understand it completely, but you deserve to be happy, Nancy."

After everything you guys have been through – Will going missing, Barb –“ tears filled Nancy’s eyes at the mention of her best friend, “how can I deny you something that makes you happy?”

“I still don’t like it,” Ted grumbled. “I can’t lie, Nancy. I still don’t think it’s right.”

“Ted,” Karen sighed.

“No, Karen, I mean it. One man, one woman. That’s it. No ifs, ands, or buts!” Ted seemed to get angry halfway through his statement, but he reigned it in and calmed down by the end of his sentence.

“Well, that’s your opinion,” Nancy replied starkly. “Are you going to stop me?”

“Are you going to let me?” Ted retorted.

“No,” Nancy shook her head. “No, I’m not.”

“Then neither am I,” Ted relented. “But that doesn’t mean I support this.”

And Nancy – good girl, perfect grades, never breaks the rules Nancy – nodded. “I can live with that.”

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

You guys, thanks for being so patient! I didn't mean to fall off the face of the earth, but life is crazy. In the past two weeks, I've started a new job and moved halfway across the state! So here's an extra long chapter to make up for my absence! Please enjoy!

//we take your mum's car to the edge of the town,
and we drive, yeah we go 'round and 'round --
anobrain;; the 1975//

In the weeks leading up to Christmas break for Hawkins, Steve and Jonathan could tell something was bugging Nancy. At first, they attributed it to the fight she'd had with her parents, but when they were going on two weeks of her acting strange, the boys decided to intervene.

The three of them were splayed out on the floor of Steve's basement, Steve's stomach having become a pillow for both Jonathan and Nancy as they watched some television. Steve was lightly petting Nancy's hair and his other hand was intertwined with Jonathan's.

When the commercial break started, Jonathan squeezed Steve's hand, and Steve picked his head up. Now or never, he guessed. "Hey, Nance? Can I ask you a question that will potentially piss you off?"

"Uh, sure," Nancy laughed.

"You've been in a weird mood for a few weeks. Is everything okay with you?" Steve asked carefully. Nancy lifted her head off Steve's stomach and looked to him, frowning.

"What do you mean?" she wondered.

"You've been tense and short with, well, everyone," Jonathan jumped in gently. "We just...given the past few weeks, we wanted to see if there was anything we could do if something was wrong."

Nancy was silent for a moment, then she shrugged, looking down at her lap and wringing her hands. Immediately Jonathan and Steve both sat up almost in sync, concern growing immensely. “Nan, talk to us,” Steve murmured.

“I want to get away,” she replied suddenly. “From Hawkins. With you guys.” Nancy looked up at the two of them but immediately dropped her head again, crossing her arms across her chest.

“Nan,” Steve chuckled softly, reaching out to tap her chin with his finger until she looked up. “Is that what this is about? We can definitely do that,” his voice was gentle; Nancy felt like her world stopped when he talked like that.

“I just want to go somewhere people don’t know us,” she continued while Steve moved to cup her cheek in his hand, listening intently. “Somewhere bigger than us, where we blend in and no one cares that there’s three of us. Somewhere we don’t have to worry about people seeing us, somewhere we don’t have to care about what they think.” Nancy’s voice was strained and sad, but hopeful. It made Steve’s heart ache, and a quick glance over to Jonathan revealed he felt very similar.

“Then let’s go,” Jonathan whispered, scooting closer and wrapping his arms around Nancy’s shoulders. “School gets out next Friday. Let’s get in the car and fucking go.” His chin rested on Nancy’s shoulder, and the two of them looked at Steve.

“Yeah, let’s go,” Steve agreed. “We’ll take my car and disappear and go somewhere we’re complete strangers to everyone.” The tiniest smile broke out on Nancy’s face and she sagged back against Jonathan’s chest, and Jonathan hugged her tight. “Sound good?” he smiled.

“Sounds perfect,” she sighed. “So perfect.”

~*~*~

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

Nancy couldn’t take her eyes of the clock, watching as the seconds

hand inched around the numbers. All she could think about was the bags packed and tossed in the trunk of Steve's car, the map sitting on his passenger seat with a route marked for Rochester.

It seemed like forever before the bell rang, and immediately Nancy was up off her seat and out the classroom. With that kind of enthusiasm, Nancy was unsurprisingly the first one at the car. When Jonathan and Steve came out of the school a few minutes later, Nancy was sitting on the trunk – Steve swore his heart stopped. “God,” he whispered. “She’s gorgeous.”

“Yeah,” Jonathan agreed quickly, a smile spreading across his face. He stepped forward to the car and immediately Nancy turned to smile at them. “Afternoon, gorgeous,” Jonathan hummed, reaching out to help Nancy slide off the car.

“Hi,” Nancy smiled, her hand squeezing Jonathan’s hand in greeting. Then she turned and did the same to Steve; he felt like he had an electric jolt going up his arm. God, he loved her.

“Hi,” Steve smiled, fighting the urge to kiss her. “You ready to go?” he wondered.

“I’ve been ready,” Nancy scoffed, and the three of them put their backpacks in the trunk, next to their packed bags. “As long as we stop for road trip snacks first.” She opened the back door of Steve’s car and slid into the seat.

“You don’t want the front?” Jonathan frowned, poking his head in to look at her.

“No, I can nap back here,” she laughed. “You take shotgun.” Shrugging, Jonathan easily sat in the passenger seat and Steve hopped into the driver’s seat.

“You’ve never road tripped with Nancy before, have you?” Steve laughed. A little confused, Jonathan shook his head. “Ah, I see. So you don’t know that if a car moves for more than an hour, Nancy is out cold,” he chuckled.

“No,” Jonathan made himself laugh in response, but an odd sense of

jealousy seemed to simmer in his stomach. It didn't happen often, but on occasion some comment was made that seemed like a poke at Jonathan that he hadn't dated Nancy as long as Steve has before the three of them got together.

"You'll know soon," Nancy giggled quietly, reaching up around the head rest of Jonathan's seat to stroke his cheek. The jealousy simmered a little less, and Jonathan nuzzled closer to her hand. That's how they started their trip – Steve driving, Jonathan resting against Nancy's arm, and Nancy leaning against the back seat so she could stroke Jonathan's cheek.

Slightly outside of Hawkins, Steve pulled into the parking lot of a tiny convenience stores. "I'll buy the first round of snacks," Nancy exclaimed while getting out of the car.

"I'll fill up the car," Steve offered.

"What do you want from inside?" Nancy asked, then she and Jonathan made their way inside after listening to Steve's order. "You've been quiet," Nancy noticed while Jonathan stared intently at the bags of chips. "Are you alright? You want to be here, right?" she suddenly seemed panicked, like she'd forced him here.

"What? Yes, of course, Nance," Jonathan insisted, turning to look at her. He ran his hands down her arms and smiled sadly. "I want to be here. I just..." he trailed off, looking out the window to where Steve was standing by the car. "I couldn't take you on road trips when it was just us," he sighed. "That...that's not my fault."

"What? Jonathan, no, of course not! That's not your fault," Nancy replied immediately, grabbing his hands. "Jon, that's not what he meant," she explained.

"I know," Jonathan interjected immediately. "I know that. It just... stung, I guess." Nervously, Jonathan bit his lip and looked away from Nancy's sad eyes.

"You want to talk about it with him?" Nancy asked gently. Jonathan shook his head.

"No, not really. I just...I want you to know that if I could have, I would've," Jonathan shrugged. Nancy's sad smile grew a little bigger and she reached up, brushing his hair out of his eyes. "I would've given you the world."

"I know," Nancy whispered, standing up on her toes to kiss his cheek. "You are," she continued. "You are giving me the world. You are my world," she promised.

"I love you, Nancy Wheeler," Jonathan replied softly, blinking quickly because he was not about to cry in the middle of a convenience store.

"I love you too, Jonathan Byers," Nancy smiled, snuggling into his chest and hugging him tightly before pulling away. "Now, we find road trip snacks." Nancy's hand settled in Jonathan's, the two of them roaming the aisles grabbing sodas, chips, and a few candy bars.

When they paid and made their way back to the parking lot, Steve was leaning against the hood of his car, pushing to a standing position when he saw his boyfriend and girlfriend. "Looks like a good haul," he commented, coming around to their side of the car and opening Nancy's door for her. When Jonathan moved to open his door, Steve turned and opened it for him instead.

Jonathan paused, a bit surprised. The boys had never been anything near to couple-y in public, and Jonathan wasn't sure how to respond to the affection. "In you get, my love," Steve murmured softly, making sure Jon was the only one who could hear him. Jonathan blushed bright red as he fumbled with the seatbelt, clicking it into place just as Steve slid into his own seat. "You're red, Jonny Boy," Steve commented, turning in his seat and running a hand down Jonathan's warm cheek.

"You...you surprised me, that's all," Jonathan admitted, looking down at his shoes. "I'm not used to this." The car was quiet for a moment, and Jonathan squirmed a bit uncomfortably, feeling like he was drowning in the silence.

"Well, we've got all weekend to get used to it," Steve finally cut in, reaching his hand out as an offer for Jonathan to take, but not taking

it without Jonathan's approval. Of course, Jonathan took his hand. By the time Steve maneuvered the car onto the highway, Jonathan felt better, Nancy had opened the gummy bears, and Steve was quietly singing along to the radio.

It was good. So very good.

~*~

As Steve had originally stated, an hour into the drive, Nancy was asleep. She had curled up against the window, using her jacket as a pillow and her arms crossed over her chest. Jonathan had chuckled softly when he realized she was asleep, looking over at Steve. "You were right," he whispered. Steve looked in the rear-view mirror and the edges of his mouth turned up in a smile before he reached over and turned the radio down some.

"She looks so cute when she sleeps," Steve commented quietly. "So do you," he added after a moment. Jonathan's stomach fluttered and he looked out the window, smiling.

"So do you," Jonathan echoed. "But you snore," he commented.

"Oh fuck off. No I don't," Steve laughed quietly, sticking out his tongue at Jonathan.

"How do you know? You're sleeping," Jonathan retorted, glancing over his shoulder to make sure they weren't waking Nancy.

"It's going to take a lot to wake her," Steve told Jonathan, completely ignoring the earlier question. The boys then dissolved into conversations about anything and everything that crossed their minds. But then, Jonathan fell asleep too. Steve looked over after asking a question and not receiving an answer, and he scoffed softly.

I would find two people who fall asleep during road trips, wouldn't I? he thought to himself, running his thumb across the back of Jonathan's hand, which Steve still held. By now, the afternoon sun was setting and painting the sky with beautiful shades of reds and blues.

This was Steve's favorite part of the day. That small window of time where the sky was transitioning and it seemed that every perceivable

color on the earth was in the sky. On any given day Steve could see the sunset, it made his heart feel a little bigger and like it beat a little stronger. But today?

Today, flying down the highway with the loves of his life sitting in the car, it was perfect. The way Nancy had propped herself against the window and her hair fell in her face; how Jonathan's hand laid limply in Steve's; how the music played just softly enough it wouldn't wake them, but loud enough that if Steve listened close, he could hear it.

The colors deepened until the sky seemed split between fire engine red and a deep blue that signaled the night's beginning. It made a smile spread across Steve's face and his heart blossomed in his chest. He drove in quiet contentment while the dark took over the road, his headlights cutting through the night.

Steve had long since lost track of time when Nancy awoke. He heard her yawn as she sat up, and he glanced in the rearview mirror and smiled softly at her. "Welcome to the world of the living," he whispered softly.

Nancy scoffed and then turned her attention to Jonathan's silhouette. "Is he sleeping?" she asked, to which Steve nodded.

"He passed out about an hour after you," Steve told her. "How ya doin'? Hungry?" he wondered.

"Yeah," Nancy admitted, stretching as much as the car's back seat would allow. "Where are we?" she wondered.

"Not sure," Steve admitted. "I know we're on the right highway, but no idea where," he chuckled softly and then shrugged. "I'm sure at the very least there's going to be a McDonald's in the next town though, so we'll find something to eat."

"We're traveling to New York and you're going to feed us McDonald's for dinner?" Jonathan's sleepy voice entered the conversation, and Steve squeezed his hand in greeting. Shortly after, Jonathan pulled away so he could rub his eyes.

“Never knew you were too good for Micky D’s, Byers,” Steve scoffed. “How’d you sleep?” he continued in a softer voice.

“Very well, surprisingly,” Jonathan admitted. “Sorry I fell asleep on you.”

“You needed rest, don’t apologize,” Steve replied. The car settled back into comfortable silence as Nancy and Jonathan continued to wake up, and Steve kept on his way. A large sign beside the highway caught his eye, and he gestured to it. “Okay, looks like soon we have a McDonald’s and a pizza shop and a burger shop.”

“I could eat pizza,” Jonathan murmured. “What about you, Nance?”

“Sure,” Nancy agreed, so Steve pulled off a few minutes later in front of the smallest pizza shop he’d ever seen. “Oh my god, it looks like the beginning of a horror movie,” she gasped.

“I’m sure it’s fine! Look, there’s an old couple eating!” Steve insisted, gesturing to the window where, indeed, an elderly couple was sat in a booth, a pizza between them. “Come on, guys, these little hole in the wall places sometimes turn out to be the best places!” he turned and pouted at the two of them.

“Fine, but if we all get food poisoning and die, it’s your fault,” Jonathan insisted, opening the car door and unfolding himself from the seat. As he stretched, he opened the back door for Nancy and opened his arms to hug her.

She fell against him easily, and Jonathan relished in the feeling for a quiet moment. Nancy’s nose nuzzled against Jonathan’s neck, and it made his heart flutter. “Incoming,” she whispered.

Jonathan was confused. He hadn’t been expecting to hear that. But before he could ask what she meant, Jonathan felt a heavy weight settle against his back, smelled Steve’s cologne, and sighed happily as Steve’s arms encompassed him and Nancy both.

“I was promised pizza,” Steve murmured against Jonathan’s neck, punctuating his sentence with a kiss to Jonathan’s temple. “But I can get behind this, too.”

“We are not going to stand in the parking lot and hug all night like a bunch of weirdos,” Nancy insisted, pulling away from the boys. Instead of pulling away, Steve just dropped his hands to Jonathan’s waist and rested his chin on the boy’s shoulder.

It made Jonathan’s chest constrict – almost like embarrassment, but Jonathan didn’t want to call it that. His hands came to rest on Steve’s wrists and he cleared his throat. “So, pizza?”

“Yes, please!” Nancy grinned, and both Steve and Jonathan felt their hearts melting at her smile. So they headed inside and squeezed into a tiny booth, Nancy across from Steve and Jonathan. It was odd, Steve thought. Usually the boys took turns sitting beside Nancy, but this was supposed to be branching out for them. So, Steve sat next to Jonathan, swallowing the fear creeping up his throat.

They had a great dinner though – Steve had been right. This little tiny hole in the wall had some of the best pizza the teens had ever tasted, and by the time Steve had pulled out his wallet to pay for their meal, they were all stuffed and content.

Making their way back out to the car, Jonathan sidled up beside Steve and gently slid his hand into Steve’s. Steve got goosebumps up his arm. “Let me drive. You’ve gotten us this far, you deserve a break.” Jonathan didn’t phrase it like a request or a question, just a statement. Steve found he couldn’t protest, so he just dangled the keys in front of Jonathan.

“Kiss for the keys,” he insisted with a pout, puckering his lips. Jonathan rolled his eyes but complied, quickly pressing his lips against Steve’s and then grabbing the keys. Grinning widely, Steve stepped away and moved toward Nancy. “Front or back, Princess?”

“I’ll take the front so you can stretch out,” Nancy smiled. “Maybe I’ll actually stay awake,” she giggled. Steve leaned over and opened the door for his girlfriend, kissing her forehead before she slid into the seat.

Jonathan settled in the driver’s seat and spent a moment adjusting the mirrors before he started the car. “You going to keep me company?” Jonathan asked after a couple minutes of quiet. The radio

played in the background, and the two of them could already hear the telltale quiet snores of Steve in the back.

“Yeah, I slept too much before,” Nancy admitted with a laugh. “So even if I didn’t want to talk to you, guess I don’t have a choice,” she teased.

“Well that’s just not nice,” Jonathan pouted at her. “You like spending time with me,” he insisted. Nancy nodded and dropped her hand onto Jonathan’s arm.

“I do,” she promised. “Always have.” After a second, she settled back in the seat and put her feet up on the dash. “What are you most excited about for New York?” she wondered softly.

Jonathan thought for a moment, drumming his fingers against the steering wheel. He was silent for a bit too long though, and Nancy smirked knowingly. “You can say it,” she offered. “I won’t be mad.”

“Steve,” Jonathan admitted. “I’m most excited for being with Steve,” he bit his lip and glanced at Nancy. “I’m excited for you, too,” he insisted. “I just...” he trailed off and looked in the rearview at Steve’s sleeping figure. “We don’t get to, ya know, be as couple-y in Hawkins,” he shrugged.

“I know,” Nancy promised in that gentle voice that always made Jonathan feel like all was right in the world. “I understand.”

“And we get to be couple-y together,” Jonathan continued. “Is it still a couple if it’s three?” he wondered after a second. Nancy was quiet, then she laughed.

“I actually don’t know. Maybe someone in New York can tell us,” she giggled. “Whatever it’s called,” she continued. “I’m excited to get to do it with you,” she whispered. She settled back in her chair and balled up her sweater, again using it as a pillow against the window.

“Me too,” Jonathan smiled softly, the words disappearing into the quiet of the car. For some time, the two sat in silence happily, and at one point, Nancy took Jonathan’s hand and held it tightly.

The longer he drove, the less crowded the roads got. Somewhere

along the way, Nancy fell asleep, and suddenly Jonathan was alone with his thoughts. He wasn't surprised though – the clock on the dash read 3:37 AM.

It was relaxing, honestly. Ever since things had kicked off when Will went missing, Jonathan pretty much always felt like his world was moving at a million miles an hour. At least now, things seemed to move at a normal speed and he could hear himself think.

Just about the time that Jonathan's eyes began to grow tired, he passed a rest stop and decided to pull into the parking lot. He came to a stop as slowly as possible, not wanting to wake the others in the car. He was unsuccessful though, and Steve sat up, rubbing his eyes. "You okay, Jon?" Steve murmured.

"Yeah, I just need to stretch my legs for a bit," Jonathan ran his hands over his face, stifling a yawn. "Will you stay here with her?" he asked, unbuckling after Steve nodded. He got out of the car and quietly closed the door, making his way up the dimly lit sidewalk into the rather sketchy looking rest stop.

The yellowed fluorescent light in the building made Jonathan's stomach uneasy, especially when the lights flickered. Trying to rationalize it that the rest stop was old and the wiring was faulty, Jonathan moved further into the bathroom. After using the bathroom, Jonathan turned toward the sink, noting somewhere in the back of his brain how strange it was there was no mirror. *Doesn't really matter*, he thought to himself. *I know I just look tired*.

Next Jonathan washed his face in the sink in hopes of waking himself up. He dropped his face down toward the sink and had just begun rubbing his hands on his face when he felt someone grab his waist and pull him away from the sink.

Jonathan wasn't sure what sound left his mouth, if any at all, but his heart leapt into his chest and he immediately began to panic as whatever had grabbed him pushed him toward the wall. Just as Jonathan's brain was kicking into fight or flight mode, familiar lips pressed against his neck and hands gripped his hips, spinning Jonathan around until he was face to face with Steve's grinning face. "Jesus, Steve," Jonathan gasped, smacking his boyfriend's chest. "You

can't *do* that!"

"Do what?" Steve pouted, kissing at Jonathan endlessly. "Kiss you?"

"Scare the shit out of me!" Jonathan gasped, pulling away from Steve's mouth. "Where's Nancy? Did you leave her in the car?" Jonathan realized he was panicking, but there was nothing he could do about it now. "You can't *do* that!" he repeated.

"Jon, hey, oh my god, Jonathan," Steve's voice was concerned, and needy lips were replaced with gentle hands cupping Jonathan's face. "Take a breath. I'm sorry. I-I didn't think I was going to scare you. Nancy's fine. She woke up and went to use the bathroom, that's all. She's not in the car," Steve kept his voice even and calm, his thumbs caressing Jonathan's cheekbones while Jonathan's eyes studied Steve's face carefully. "Are you okay?" he whispered.

"You just, you caught me by surprise," Jonathan mumbled, dropping his forehead onto Steve's shoulder and taking a shuddering breath. Steve, feeling like a complete asshole, held his boyfriend tightly and pressed a comforting kiss against Jonathan's hair.

"Sorry," Jonathan whispered after a second. Steve shook his head.

"No, you're right, I really shouldn't come sneaking up on people in bathrooms," Steve admitted. "You just looked so cute and I thought you would know it was me and I didn't think," he shrugged. "Are you sure you're okay?" he asked again.

"I'm fine," Jonathan promised, bringing his head up and looking at Steve in the eyes, his eyebrow raised questioningly. "You thought me washing my face was so cute you had to push me up against a wall to kiss me?" he asked, voice light but not teasing. He didn't like teasing Steve when it came to affection very often, because more times than not, Steve himself was already hesitant.

"What can I say, Byers? You have a very attractive body and I happen to like you a lot," Steve smiled right back, leaning forward to peck his lips lightly. "Like, a lot a lot," he confirmed.

"Hm, good to know," Jonathan smirked, bringing his arms up to

draped over Steve's shoulders, his hands finding purchase in Steve's hair. Lightly pulling Steve toward him, Jonathan kissed him deeply. "Good thing I like you a lot, too," he whispered.

"You still wanna do this?" Steve wondered softly. He could feel Jonathan's heartbeat from where their chests were pushed together – he knew the other was still frightened.

"Of course I do," Jonathan replied seriously, kissing him again. "You're not allowed to scare me like that and not make it up to me," he hummed before running his hands down Steve's back. Steve just shrugged and moved in closer, trapping Jonathan between his body and the wall. For a few minutes, the boys were aware of little more than each other, exchanging quiet words between heated kisses and eager hands exploring each other's bodies.

They lost track of time, but suddenly the sound of a clearing throat drew them apart almost instantly, Steve leaping away from Jonathan and both boys turning to the doorway with wide, guilty eyes. Nancy stood in the doorway, arms crossed over her chest and a smirk on her face.

"You boys having fun?" she teased with a light voice. "I can't think of any better place to make out than a rest stop bathroom at 4 A.M."

"You can always join the party," Jonathan offered, pushing off from against the wall and leaning against Steve instead. "We'd love to have you."

"Yeah, it just wouldn't be fair for us to not share the germs with you too," Steve snorted, taking Jonathan's hand and leading him toward the doorway where Nancy stood.

"As intriguing as that sounds, I'd love to hit the road," Nancy replied. "We can't be too far from New York, can we?" she wondered.

"Probably another hour or two," Jonathan supplied easily. "Not far."

"I want to drive," Nancy interjected, looking between the boys. "You've both driven, so let me do my part," she smiled.

"Nan, it's 4 A.M.," Steve responded. "You don't need to be driving

this late.”

“Oh don’t pull that chivalry on me,” Nancy laughed good naturedly before giving her best puppy dog eyes to Jonathan. “Let me have the keys,” she insisted sweetly. Jonathan almost immediately handed over the keys, and Steve looked to his boyfriend with his mouth agape.

“It’s that easy to persuade you? Come on, man,” he teased. “Such a pushover.”

“This just means we can sit in the backseat and kiss,” Jonathan pointed out with a smirk. Steve stopped yet again and a grin began to spread across his face. “Unless, of course, you really think I should drive,” he teased.

“Nope, I think Nan’s got it,” Steve insisted, his head nodding quickly before opening the back door. “After you, my love,” he offered.

“That’s what I thought,” Jonathan smiled, sliding into the backseat. Nancy just rolled her eyes and climbed into the driver’s seat, starting the car.

“You two better keep it PG,” Nancy warned as she adjusted the car mirrors. “Otherwise that’s just not fair to me,” she huffed.

“Okay,” both boys responded immediately, but the words were muffled by each other’s lips. Nancy just rolled her eyes and shifted the car into drive, taking off into the night.

“Bunch of horny teenagers,” she mumbled mostly to herself. Not out of anger or irritation, she realized.

Mainly jealousy, if she was being honest.

~*~*~

It didn’t take long for the boys to tire themselves out, and when Nancy looked back, Steve was slumped against Jonathan, both boys fast asleep. Nancy scoffed to herself and turned the radio down a bit now that she wasn’t having to drown out the sounds of kissing. In the distance, she could see the sky beginning to lighten, the prelude to

sunrise. It felt oddly normal, knowing they'd been traveling through the night. It simultaneously seemed like just a few hours and a few days since they'd left town. Nancy hoped this weekend would feel like it was going to last forever. She cherished any time she had with the boys, obviously, but this was special. This was new. This was freedom.

The sun peeked over the horizon, and Nancy watched it in fascination. As much as the girl loved sunrises, she didn't see them all that often – especially now that she was older. When she was younger, she used to crawl out onto her roof to watch the sun rise in the mornings before school, but as she began staying up later to write papers or study for exams, sleep became more important than watching the skies paint themselves each morning.

But today she reveled in the pinks and oranges that streaked across the sky; how the white clouds managed to contrast the sky so perfectly. She felt the sun begin to warm her skin through the window as it moved up into the sky, and the night fell away as if it had never even been there.

Maybe it was psychosomatic, but Nancy felt a weight lift off her shoulders as she drove past the giant "Welcome to New York" sign. Maybe here they wouldn't be afraid to be themselves. Maybe here they could explore their boundaries a little more, no longer confined by the small minds of Hawkins, Indiana. Maybe here, Nancy thought, they'd discover what the world truly had to offer three people who were in love.

7. Chapter 7

Summary for the Chapter:

//and you're the only thing that's going on in my mind, taking over my life a second time -- ugh;; the 1975//

Rochester was every bit as perfect as the teens hoped it would be. They stayed in a tiny, no-name motel and spent the weekend sightseeing and exploring. The sights were gorgeous, the people were kinder, and even snow coating everything seemed brighter, softer, nicer than the snow they had in Hawkins.

The first time the three of them “went public” as Jonathan called it, they were walking through the park on their way to lunch. Steve had his arm wrapped around Nancy’s waist as they trekked across the snowy sidewalk, and Jonathan walked on the other side of Steve, his hands buried deep in his pockets.

The three of them were chatting about the fun things they had seen that morning when Jonathan felt something grasping at his coat arm. He looked down and saw Steve’s hand making its way down Jonathan’s arm. Confused, Jonathan looked up at his boyfriend, who glanced over at Jonathan with a pout. “Gimme,” Steve whined playfully.

Jonathan looked around at the rather populated park, then swallowed thickly. “Now?” he wondered.

“It’s why we came,” Steve smiled gently. “Come on, now’s as good a time as any,” he continued. Slowly, Jonathan took his gloved hand out of his pocket and intertwined his fingers with Steve’s.

Almost immediately Jonathan’s anxiety melted away and was replaced with nothing but happiness. He looked over at Steve and Nancy with a grin, and Nancy grinned right back. “Feels good, doesn’t it?” she asked. Jonathan nodded.

“Feels right,” he added. “I love you guys,” he blurted out before he

could stop himself. Watching both Steve and Nancy's face light up at the same time made his heart swell, and Jonathan knew in that moment that he would do whatever he had to in order to keep that smile on their faces.

And that was how they walked to the restaurant, and surprisingly... no one seemed to care. Only a few people even gave them a second look, and those that did just continued on their way like nothing was going on. Maybe Nancy had been right, maybe this was somewhere they blended in with everyone else.

At the restaurant, all three of them shrugged off jackets and scarves and gloves, piling it all on the seat beside Jonathan, who was sitting across from Nancy and Steve. Jonathan rested his chin on his hand, gazing at Steve and Nancy with a small smile on his face.

"What's going on in that head, gorgeous?" Steve finally asked, Nancy snuggling deeper into his side.

"Just...looking at you guys," Jonathan shrugged, cheeks tinging red the slightest bit. "You're both very pretty."

"Well so are you," Nancy added. "If I do say so myself, we make a very attractive group," she giggled.

"Group? Is that what we're calling it?" Steve asked with a laugh.

"Well what else are we going to call it?" Nancy laughed. "There's not really a word for this," she gestured between them.

"I don't know. Let's ask the waitress," Steve suggested, and both Nancy and Jonathan laughed before realizing Steve wasn't laughing, but instead looking across the restaurant.

"Are you crazy!?" Nancy hissed. To Jonathan and Nancy's combined horror, the waitress was on her way toward their table.

"Hey guys, how are you? My name's Hannah, I'll be serving you today. What can I get you guys to drink?" the girl smiled and looked around the table at them.

There was a brief pause where Nancy and Jonathan worried that

Steve was going to embarrass them, but instead he just ordered a soda and turned to the others with an innocent smile. After Jonathan and Nancy both ordered their drinks and Hannah walked away, Nancy shook her head at Steve.

“Not funny,” she huffed, though the smile on her face said otherwise.

“I happen to think I’m really funny,” Steve insisted, pulling her closer. “And last time I checked, so did you guys. Remember the cheese puns?”

“Oh lord, how could we forget?” Jonathan rolled his eyes before turning his gaze to Nancy and holding out his hand for her to take. “What are you eating, love?”

“I was thinking about a burger, actually,” Nancy took his hand rather easily, only slightly self-conscious of the fact that she was nestled in Steve’s side while also holding Jonathan’s hand. “What about you?”

“I think soup and a salad,” Jonathan responded, then looked to Steve expectantly.

“I want a cheese quesadilla,” Steve stated, and suddenly both partners were staring at him in disbelief. “What?” he frowned. “It sounded good!”

“You’re actually ten years old,” Jonathan scoffed. “Even Will orders better stuff than that.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen any of the Munchkins order quesadillas,” Nancy continued, poking Steve in the side. Rolling his eyes, Steve huffed and sat back in the seat.

“I’m breaking up with you,” he stated. It was at that moment the waitress approached with their drinks and she immediately stopped when she heard him. Steve turned his head and shook his head, smiling kindly at her. “No, I’m just kidding. They’re just giving me a hard time,” he promised, and immediately Hannah relaxed.

“Oh okay, good,” she laughed. “Which one of you two is being broken up with?” she wondered.

“Both of them, actually,” Steve commented. Immediately, Jonathan and Nancy’s eyes widened.

“Steve!” they gasped.

“Oh,” she nodded, putting glasses down on the table. “Cool. My cousin was in a triad once,” she said offhandedly. “So, what were you going to order that made them so angry?” she chuckled.

“Wait, what did you call it?” Steve paused, looking up at her. “Triad?”

“Yeah,” Hannah blinked at them. “That’s what it’s called, isn’t it?”

“We don’t know,” Steve admitted with a laugh. “At least, we didn’t. Oh, and a cheese quesadilla,” he smiled his signature smile, and Hannah scoffed. “Oh, not you too.”

“I just think it says something that it’s only on the kid’s menu,” she smiled before looking to Nancy. “And for the adults?” she teased.

Jonathan and Nancy both ordered their food and then Hannah walked away, Nancy and Jonathan glaring at Steve. “What?” he asked.

“You just told her like it was no big deal?” Nancy questioned. Steve shrugged, looking between them.

“I thought that’s what we were here for,” he frowned. “Besides, now we have a name for it,” he smiled innocently.

“You’re just lucky you’re so damn cute,” Jonathan relented, picking up his drink.

~*~*~

They found that after Steve spilled the beans the first time, it only got easier. Of course, there were a few people who were very clear about their distaste for the unusual couple, but overall, Rochester was nice enough.

The clerk at the grocery store all but refused to look them in the eyes;

the person renting out movies at the Blockbuster smiled kindly at them; and the front desk clerk at the hotel gave them the smallest of second glances before expertly pretending that she didn't notice anything that could be considered out of the ordinary.

When Jonathan woke up Sunday morning, he was disappointed to find the bed already empty. He rolled over where Steve had been previously and as he opened his eyes, he could hear the shower running. When Jonathan finally cleared the sleep from his eyes and sat up, he noticed Nancy sitting in the chair in the corner of the room already dressed, watching him with a smile. "Morning, sleepy head," she whispered.

"You guys are up early," Jonathan huffed good-naturedly. Usually he was the first one awake.

"We have a big day planned," Nancy replied easily, moving to sit beside him and snuggle against his sleep-warm body. "So be prepared for that."

"I thought we said no plans today," Jonathan frowned, kissing her cheek.

"Steve and I changed our minds. We want to take you somewhere," Nancy smiled. "But I can't tell you anything else so don't ask!" she giggled. Jonathan just stared at her with an amused look, eventually shrugging in defeat.

"Fine," he hummed, resting his head on her shoulder. It was in that sleepy, content silence that they waited for Steve to get out of the shower, and then Jonathan headed into the bathroom. Once the door shut, Steve turned to Nancy with a grin. "I'm going down to the lobby to get the tickets," he said in a low voice, and Nancy nodded.

"Bring up some coffee when you come back!" she requested as Steve walked out the door, and the dark-haired boy threw a thumbs up over his shoulder in acknowledgement. Finding herself alone, Nancy hummed quietly to herself as she straightened up the little messes that had accumulated over the weekend. Empty water bottles on nightstands, discarded clothes tossed near the bag full of dirty laundry that hadn't quite made it in, and shoes that resided in the

middle of the room instead of in the closet.

Steve returned a few minutes later, three disposable cups of coffee in a cardboard carrier and three tickets in his hand. He waved them at Nancy and wiggled his eyebrows excitedly. Nancy laughed and took them from his hand, looking over them. "He's going to love this," she whispered, tucking the secret away in her purse.

"Well, we couldn't be this close and not go," Steve pointed out, handing her one of the cups of coffee. "I'm a little surprised he didn't suggest it when we planned the trip." The shower shut off just then, and Nancy shrugged, dropping her voice low.

"I think he was worried about the money," she whispered, and Steve nodded in understanding.

"Oh well. It's not an issue so off to have fun we go," he grinned. "Hey, Jon, step it up! I brought coffee!"

The bathroom door opened and Jonathan stuck his head around the doorway, hair dripping water onto the floor. He stepped into the room, towel tied around his waist, and reached for the cup in Steve's hand. Steve pulled it away from him, his eyes traveling up and down Jonathan's bare torso. "You're pretty, you know that?" he hummed.

"I'm also freezing cold out here, so give me the coffee, you jerk," Jonathan pouted, though his voice was full of laughter. Steve just puckered his lips for a kiss, and Jonathan rolled his eyes before complying.

"It wouldn't be cold if you got dressed first," Nancy pointed out. Jonathan shrugged and took a deep swig of the hot beverage Steve had finally handed over.

"I was promised coffee," Jonathan replied, as if that made all the sense in the world. Then he handed the cup back to Steve and looked between his partners. "Five minutes and I'm ready. Is this like a casual thing today?" he asked, suddenly looking worried. His lip worked its way between his teeth like he did when he was nervous, and Steve clicked his tongue, reaching his thumb out to pull Jonathan's lip away.

“Hey, none of that. Jeans and a t-shirt are fine,” he promised with a gentle smile. “I promise. No one’s meeting the Queen of England today,” he joked.

“Okay,” Jonathan replied, shoulders falling in relief. “Five minutes,” he repeated before disappearing into the bathroom again. Steve turned to Nancy to say something, but found her pouting.

“Oh my god, what’s wrong with you?” he asked, sounding a bit exasperated. “Why is no one happy?” he shouted quietly, and he heard Jonathan laugh from the bathroom.

“I was looking forward to meeting the Queen,” Nancy huffed. Then she lifted her head and grinned at Steve, who was staring at her as if he was infuriated but also in love. Then Steve laughed and hugged her tightly, nuzzling her ear.

“Who needs the Queen when you have us, huh?”

~~~

Getting up so early on a Sunday had been hard, and keeping their destination a secret from Jonathan even harder. When they climbed into the taxi, Jonathan thought he’d found a loophole – someone had to tell the taxi how to get there! But Steve just handed the taxi driver a folded up paper and put a finger to his lips, and the driver nodded. “Now that’s just not cool,” Jonathan huffed.

“I told you it was a secret,” Nancy replied smartly from beside him. “Now just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride,” she grinned. It was even worth the wait that they had to sit in traffic while Jonathan seemed to radiate a nervous energy beside Nancy, not know where they were headed.

But it had been completely worth it as soon as the taxi stopped in front of the art museum and Jonathan’s eyes went wide with an almost child-like excitement. “No way!” he gasped, looking between Nancy and Steve in disbelief. “What are we doing here?” he asked, almost as if he was afraid of the answer.

“Surprise,” Nancy and Steve chorused. Nancy pulled the tickets out of

her purse and handed them to Jonathan. Jonathan's face was still slack with surprise, and Nancy had to all but pull him out of the seat of the taxi. Steve took Jonathan's free hand after pulling the tickets from his grip, and Steve squeezed lightly.

"You ready?" Steve asked. Jonathan nodded so hard that Steve was afraid his head would fall off his neck, and Nancy giggled at them.

"Well come on then, we can't just stand on the steps all day!" She tugged at Jonathan's hand, and together they headed up the concrete steps leading into the building. Jonathan felt like his heart was going to explode out of his chest with happiness. He was sandwiched between Nancy and Steve, and they were at the Rochester Art Museum, of all places. This was a dream come true, he realized with a start. This was everything he wanted.

Steve handed the tickets over at the door, and then they stepped inside. Jonathan was immediately enthralled, his eyes darting around the room like he didn't know where to begin. Steve and Nancy shared a look with one another, grinning excitedly.

The day passed with the teens in their own little world, Jonathan excitedly leading Steve and Nancy around the museum and acting as their own personal tour guide. Jonathan was able to tell the other two a lot about who produced what art, how they did it, and in some cases, what inspired the art.

Steve relished in Jonathan's excitement. The way that Jonathan bounced excitedly on the balls of his feet while explaining something to them, or the way that he'd gasp when he recognized something on the wall; all of it made Steve's heart swell. And the grin on Nancy's face told Steve that she felt the same way.

The longer they were inside the museum exploring, the more it felt like the perfect way to end their weekend away. The three stayed close to one another, and smiles almost never left their faces. Quiet words were exchanged as they wandered around the museum all afternoon, and Nancy found herself wishing they never had to leave.

They came across a photo of the Vietnam Memorial, the camera capturing a side view of the monument. The wall inscribed with

names seemed to run back into the photo forever; the three teens stood silently in front of the photo and studied it quietly.

“It’s a great angle,” Jonathan commented, but then he sighed. “But god, that’s awful.”

“There’s so many names,” Steve added, wrapping his arm around Jonathan’s waist and pulling the boy closer to himself. “I hate it.”

It was silent for a long moment before Nancy spoke up. “It’s hard to believe something good can come from something like that,” she whispered.

“Every coin has two sides,” Jonathan pointed out, looking to her and then back at the photo. “I mean, look at us.”

“What?” Steve asked. “How does the Vietnam War have *anything* to do with us?”

“Not that war, specifically,” Jonathan chuckled, shaking his head. “But the whole thing with...with Will and El and all that shit. You think we’d be here if that hadn’t happened?”

Steve was silent, thinking. Then he shook his head. “Nah. I guess you’re right. We wouldn’t have fought the Demogorgen, and I would have continued thinking you were some weirdo and kept hanging out with Tommy and Carol,” he said honestly. Then he looked to Nancy and Jonathan and smiled. “So I’m glad we’re here now, even if we had to do all that shit.”

“Me too,” Nancy whispered. She swiped at her eyes to wipe away tears and moved closer to Jonathan. “Doesn’t mean I don’t want to change some things though,” she added, her hand falling to the necklace on her chest. Silently, Jonathan and Steve nodded, both of them thinking of the small picture of Barb that sat inside the locket. Jonathan pulled her against his chest, hugging her tightly.

“Guess that’s how life is,” Steve cleared his throat and swallowed thickly. “Just because something good happens doesn’t mean we didn’t have to go through shit along the way.”

More silence. Then a quiet, “I love you,” from Nancy.

“Love you too,” Steve and Jonathan answered in tandem, and then the three laughed.

“Okay, change of subject. Today’s supposed to be fun,” Nancy chuckled, and Steve nodded his agreement.

“Hey, look at this one!” Jonathan commented, pointing to a photo of a dog sitting on a fishing pier. “That one’s cute and light-hearted and won’t spur another mushy conversation in the middle of the museum.”

“Perfect!” Steve and Nancy laughed. Just like that, the mood was restored and the three teens continued through the museum as they had previously.

Except, maybe now they were all just a tiny bit more grateful for one another. For this trip. For everything, really.

## 8. Chapter 8

### Notes for the Chapter:

Surprise! I'm sorry I disappeared for so long - I really did not mean to abandon this story for six months! I was finally able to sit and bang out this chapter for you! Please forgive me!

//With a face from a movie scene,or magazine, you know what I mean. she's definitely got the style on you -- she way out;; the 1975//

When Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan finally made it back from Rochester, Christmas was right around the corner. Between gift shopping, family visiting, and various Christmas parties thrown by family and friends, the teens were busy.

Steve's parents had a huge, fancy party at their house, and Steve's mother insisted that Jonathan and Nancy come "join the fun". Steve begrudgingly told his partners of the party, and he was shocked to realize that Nancy and Jonathan were both *excited*.

"These parties are so boring," Steve insisted. "Just a bunch of drunk rich people comparing their ridiculous conquests in life," he sighed.

"But we get to dress up!" Nancy gasped. "We get to be all dolled up and spend the whole night together," she blinked her wide eyes at Steve, and he sighed.

"What do you think, Jonny-boy?" Steve asked, resting his head on Jonathan's shoulder. Immediately, his head was upset by Jonathan's shrugging shoulders.

"It could be fun," he admitted. "Cool change from the normal."

"Even if that means that we have to explain our relationship to a ton of people who don't know what boundaries mean?" Steve wondered.

“Could be good practice,” Nancy replied innocently, blinking her wide eyes at the boys.

“Sure sounds like I’m going to be overruled here, doesn’t it?” Steve sighed. Jonathan and Nancy both nodded immediately. “Fine, but don’t be upset when it’s boring as all hell,” he warned.

“I don’t think it’ll be boring!” Nancy retorted. “When is it ever boring with all three of us together?”

“I can’t argue with that logic,” Steve replied, shrugging in defeat. “Guess I need to get my suit dry cleaned then.”

~\*~\*~

The night of the party finally arrived, and Steve was the most excited for this party than he’d ever been. Not to be confused with actually being excited for the party, because he wasn’t. Really, he was just excited to see Jonathan and Nancy all dressed up.

Every time there was a knock on the door, Steve hurried to answer it, inevitably having to feign recognition of some business-man and his wife who always seemed to recognize him. After what seemed like hours of uncomfortable small talk about Steve’s plan following graduation or when on Earth he’d grown up so much, Steve finally opened the door and the couple standing there literally made him stop in his tracks.

“You guys look incredible,” Steve breathed, opening the door wider and grinning at Jonathan and Nancy. Jonathan wore a well-fitted suit with a red tie, and Nancy stood beside him wearing a gorgeous dark green dress that hugged her figure and made Steve literally forget how to breathe.

Steve reached his arms out and took each of the others’ hands in his own and led them inside, Jonathan swinging the door shut behind them. He looked around at all the people in the house, fighting down the feeling that *he did not belong here*. Instead, he just focused on Steve and Nancy, following them into the kitchen.

“You guys want something to drink?” Steve asked, and both his

partners nodded almost immediately. “Yeah, these parties tend to make you want to do that,” Steve scoffed playfully. He grabbed a couple of clean wine glasses from the kitchen island and pretty soon Nancy was nursing a glass of wine while Steve poured beer into the glasses for him and Jonathan.

“Classy,” Jonathan laughed before taking the offered drink.

“Gotta play the part, Byers,” Steve grinned at his boyfriend before looking to the door leading back into the living room. “Well, shall we?”

“What are we shall-ing, exactly?” Nancy chuckled.

“Walking around and acting like we care what people are telling us,” Steve stated easily. Jonathan laughed and quickly reached for Nancy’s hand, his anxiety calming as he felt her squeeze his hand.

Steve’s arm appeared around Jonathan’s waist and Jonathan smiled at Steve. “You look handsome,” Jonathan murmured, his eyes traveling up and down Steve’s suit.

“Thanks, love,” Steve grinned. “You look amazing as well,” he leaned over and kissed Jonathan’s cheek softly. “And did you see our girlfriend?” he asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

“I sure did,” Jonathan grinned, pressing a quick kiss to Nancy’s cheek. “We even made out in the car before we came in here,” he admitted. “She just looked too good.”

“How dare you!” Steve gasped as they entered the living room. “I’ve been in here in my own personal hell, and you’ve been making out in the car?! *Without me?!!*” he pouted dramatically at the two of them, and Nancy scoffed.

“You act like you don’t make out with us every chance you get,” Nancy laughed. “You poor deprived little thing,” she rolled her eyes.

Jonathan opened his mouth to jump into the conversation, but then the three of them heard a loud, “Steven! How have you been?”

“Just, Steve, actually,” Steve sighed quietly before stepping forward

and reaching a hand out to shake the hand of the man in front of you.

“You’ve sure grown up since we’ve last seen ya!” the man commented. “Are these your...friends?” he asked slowly. Steve looked over at Jonathan and Nancy and then he shook his head, stepping back beside Nancy and gesturing to each as they were introduced.

“Nope. Jonathan’s my boyfriend. Nancy’s my girlfriend,” he said easily. All three teens were entertained by the range of emotions that crossed the man’s face. First he looked confused, then he looked embarrassed, and then unsure of how to respond.

“Oh, I see, yeah, okay. You teens are so...modern,” the man stammered with red cheeks, and almost as suddenly as he’d appeared, he was gone.

The three were quiet for a moment, then Nancy began to giggle into Jonathan’s shoulder. This started a chain reaction, and then suddenly all three teens were laughing so hard they couldn’t breathe.

“Steve, what on Earth is going on?” Steve’s father appeared behind them, and immediately Steve sobered. “What is so funny?”

“Nothing, sir,” Steve replied, a thinly veiled laugh behind the words. “Just, telling a fun story is all,” he smiled.

“Well try and keep it down, for God’s sake. This is an adult’s party. Stop acting like a child,” Steve’s father sighed before heading back into the crowd.

“I told you guys this would be boring,” Steve sighed. “This is pretty much all there is to do tonight,” he admitted apologetically.

“I don’t know about you guys, but that was entertaining,” Nancy joked, a grin plastered on her face. Steve rolled his eyes and pulled her closer to his side, casting a glance over at Jonathan.

“You alright, Johnny-boy?” Steve asked in concern, studying just how stiffly Jonathan was standing, his eyes shifting around the room like he was looking for the quickest possible way out. After a moment in



which Jonathan did not answer, Nancy squeezed Jonathan's hand.

"Jonathan?" she called quietly. "Earth to Jonathan?" Jonathan's head jerked back toward the other two, raising his eyebrow.

"Hmm? Did you say something?" he asked.

"Yes," Steve replied matter-of-factly. "What's going on? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine!" Jonathan answered too quickly, and he almost laughed out loud at the way that Nancy and Steve's heads both cocked to the side in disbelief after his statement. "I promise," he repeated. "I just zoned out."

"Uh huh," Steve frowned. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," Jonathan insisted with a laugh. "I swear." With that, Steve gave him one more quizzical look and then turned back to the people all about his living room.

And that's how they continued for a bit – Steve introducing Nancy and Jonathan to whoever came up, while Nancy and Jonathan trailed behind him slightly awkwardly. "Why did we think this was a good idea, again?" Jonathan whispered in Nancy's ear, and Nancy gestured between the three of them.

"Because look how good we look!" she grinned. Then she nudged Jonathan's shoulder and gave him a knowing look. "So what's really going on in that head of yours? Something's been bugging you since we got here," Nancy insisted softly.

"This is just...very out of my element," Jonathan shrugged. "And I'm awkward as hell when I'm comfortable," he chuckled before looking around again. "It's just going to take some getting used to."

"Well, you're doing great," Nancy promised, squeezing his hand again. Just then, Steve turned to them and rolled his eyes as he approached them.

"Please get me out of this hell hole," he whispered with a shake of his head. "If one more person says they had 'no idea I was gay!'" he

exclaimed dramatically. "I'm going to scream. I'm not gay!" he huffed.

"I beg to differ," Jonathan smirked. Steve just looked at him and let out the most pitiful groan, looking lost. "Sorry," Jonathan giggled. "It had to be done," he insisted.

"Let's go up to your room for a minute," Nancy suggested, rubbing Steve's arm to comfort him. "Just to give us all a break from all of this."

Carefully avoiding the attention of Steve's parents, the trio made their way up the stairs and into Steve's room, Jonathan closing the door behind them. The talking and the music of the party was now muffled, and Steve groaned dramatically as he flopped backwards onto his bed. "This party blows," he complained while Nancy gingerly sat down beside him, smoothing her dress.

"I know it's not the blow out ragers you're used to," Nancy laughed quietly. Jonathan scoffed as he joined them on Steve's bed, his hand falling to Steve's chest and toying with the button of his collar. "But hey, we got to see each other all dressed up," she mentioned. "And I didn't have to spend the night listening to the Munchkins yell about Dungeons and Dragons."

Steve cracked one eye open and pouted. "Wait, there's a D and D game going on and we're stuck *here*? God damn it!"

"I knew it!" Jonathan gasped, lightly slapping Steve's chest. "I knew you liked the game! No one can pretend to be *that* interested! You're a nerd!" Jonathan sounded far too excited by this turn of events, and Steve sat up, grabbing the back of Jonathan's neck and pulling him close so that their foreheads were touching.

"Hey, Byers? Shut up," Steve retorted playfully. "For name calling like that, you owe me approximately four kisses." A grin pulled at the edges of Jonathan's mouth before he pushed himself against Steve and kissed him hard until Steve had to pull away to breathe.

"Or that, that was great," Steve sighed happily. "All is forgiven."

“Now who’s the one that’s left out, huh?” Nancy huffed, a teasing lift to her voice while she leaned dramatically against Steve’s shoulder.

The teens spent a few minutes relaxing in Steve’s room, mainly making fun of the multiple people they had met that night. It was the most interesting party of his father’s that Steve had ever attended; that much was a fact.

“Is your dad going to be looking for us?” Jonathan wondered after about twenty minutes. Steve sighed and nodded, looking at the clock on his bedside.

“Yeah, but luckily for us, there’s only about an hour left before people usually start to head home. Then we can disappear and get out of my house for a while,” Steve proposed.

“You just want to catch the last part of the D and D game, don’t you?” Nancy laughed. Steve didn’t verbally answer, but the bright red blush on his cheeks said enough. He pulled himself off the bed and made his way into the bathroom, leaving Nancy and Jonathan to themselves with a quick ‘no making out!’ tossed over his shoulder.

“At least there will be pizza there,” Nancy relented, standing and offering her hand to her boyfriend so he would get up off the bed.

“Nancy Wheeler, you know the way to my heart,” Jonathan chuckled, standing and kissing her cheek.

“What? Cold, picked over pizza and the Munchkins yelling over a board game? You have some strange interests, Jonathan Byers,” Nancy grinned.

“I heard that!” Steve shouted.

~\*~

After another painful hour of Steve listening to his dad’s colleagues’ opinions on his relationship, he was finally able to escape with Jonathan and Nancy, the three of them piling into Jonathan’s car after Steve changed out of his suit and into a much more comfortable t-shirt and jeans. Jonathan had followed Steve upstairs, and Steve offered Jonathan some clothes so he could hang out at Nancy’s house

comfortably.

Steve's heart had swelled at the sight of Jonathan standing in front of him in one of Steve's shirts, which hugged Jonathan tighter than it did Steve, and a pair of his exercise shorts that always were just slightly too small.

"They make your ass look lovely," Steve pointed out, and Jonathan blushed, mumbling something about how Nancy was waiting and then heading for the door. Steve just grinned at how quickly Jonathan got embarrassed, and then followed him to the car, falling into the backseat.

"Thanks for coming tonight, guys. I know it wasn't fun, but it was definitely the least painful one of these I ever had to sit through," Steve insisted from the backseat.

"I don't know, I had a fair amount of fun," Nancy insisted, and Steve scoffed. Even Jonathan laughed for a moment and then he stopped suddenly, afraid of offending his boyfriend.

"That's a lie," Steve laughed. "God, that was an awful party."

"It was fun for like, ten minutes," Nancy reiterated with a giggle, and Steve shrugged.

"Sure, yeah, we'll go with that!" he laughed.

The three of them bantered with one another until they arrived at the Wheeler home, and there the boys headed to the basement while Nancy went upstairs to change out of her dress. "Let me know if you need help," Steve had whispered playfully in her ear before kissing her and following Jonathan. Nancy scoffed and fought the blush on her cheeks as she scurried up the stairs.

"Hey, we heard there was a party down here!" Steve called as he and Jonathan descended the stairs.

Immediately, all the kids gleefully shouted, "Steve!"

"The one and only," Steve smirked as he fell onto a chair beside Max, and Jonathan followed, standing beside Steve's chair.

"I feel so loved," Jonathan scoffed. "Everyone screamed your name and my own brother didn't even say hi," he teased, tossing a playful glance to Will, who meekly waved and grinned apologetically.

"Oh what a shame, no more chairs," Steve mentioned, wrapping his arms around Jonathan's waist and pulling the teen onto his lap. "They like me more because I understand this game," he continued, the two settling into a comfortable position in the chair.

"Gross," Max rolled her eyes and turned away from the teens. "We were doing something here before you guys came and started all the PDA," she wrinkled her nose.

"Oh shut it, Red," Steve teased, reaching out to tousle her hair. "You'll understand one day," he grinned.

"Understand what?" Nancy asked as she came down the stairs, rolling her eyes at her boyfriends' position. Steve and Jonathan just grinned innocently as Nancy sat on the beanbag her brother was on, now wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt.

"Don't worry about it," Mike grumbled as he moved over to allow for Nancy to have some more room. "Can we just play?"

"Aw someone's grumpy!" Nancy cooed playfully, poking Mike's cheek.

"Stoooooop," Mike groaned, pushing the dice toward Dustin.

"Okay, so someone fill me in on what's happened today. I've been busy being at a hella boring party with two very well dressed people," Steve laughed. Immediately, the Munchkins all jumped into an animated conversation about the campaign they'd been playing that day. It felt so much better than the party. And from the way Jonathan relaxed against his chest and Nancy grinned across the table at them, Steve knew they would agree.

And he'd swear on his life that the cold, greasy left-over pizza they ate was exponentially better than any of the hors d'oeuvres they'd been offered at his parents' party. Steve never would have pegged himself to be here: sitting in a basement full of preteens playing

games, underneath Jonathan Byers of all people, on a Saturday night. But here he was.

Steve's heart felt fit to burst out of his chest. He'd never been this happy in his life.

**Author's Note:**

This was supposed to be a one-shot but then it got out of hand so here is my attempt at an OT3 story! I've never written anything like this before, so please bear with me as I get the hang of it!

Please comment to let me know what you think!